

COVERING ISLAM

*How the Media and the Experts
Determine How
We See the Rest of the World*



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Introduction

This is the third and last in a series of books in which I have attempted to treat the modern relationship between the world of Islam, the Arabs, and the Orient on the one hand, and on the other the West, France, Britain, and in particular the United States. *Orientalism* is the most general; it traces the various phases of the relationship from the Napoleonic invasion of Egypt, through the main colonial period and the rise of modern Orientalist scholarship in Europe during the nineteenth century, up to the end of British and French imperial hegemony in the Orient after World War II and the emergence then and there of American dominance. The underlying theme of *Orientalism* is the affiliation of knowledge with power.¹ The second book, *The Question of Palestine*, provides a case history of the struggle between the native Arab, largely Muslim inhabitants of Palestine and the Zionist movement (later Israel), whose provenance and method of coming to grips with the "Oriental" realities of Palestine are largely Western. More explicitly than in *Orientalism*, my study of Palestine attempts also to describe what has been hidden be-

neath the surface of Western views of the Orient—in this case, the Palestinian national struggle for self-determination.²

In *Covering Islam* my subject is immediately contemporary: Western and specifically American responses to an Islamic world perceived, since the early seventies, as being immensely relevant and yet antipathetically troubled, and problematic. Among the causes of this perception has been the acutely felt shortage of energy supply, with its focus on Arab and Persian Gulf oil, OPEC, and the dislocating effects on Western societies of inflation and dramatically expensive fuel bills. In addition, the Iranian revolution and the hostage crisis have furnished alarming evidence of what has come to be called “the return of Islam.” Finally, there has been the resurgence of radical nationalism in the Islamic world and, as a peculiarly unfortunate adjunct to it, the return of intense superpower rivalry there. An example of the former is the Iran-Iraq war; the Soviet intervention in Afghanistan and American preparations for Rapid Deployment Forces in the Gulf region make up an example of the latter.

Even though the pun in “covering Islam” will be obvious to any reader proceeding through this book, a simple explanation is worth having at the outset. One of the points I make here and in *Orientalism* is that the term “Islam” as it is used today seems to mean one simple thing but in fact is part fiction, part ideological label, part minimal designation of a religion called Islam. In no really significant way is there a direct correspondence between the “Islam” in common Western usage and the enormously varied life that goes on within the world of Islam, with its more than 800,000,000 people, its millions of square miles of territory principally in Africa and Asia, its dozens of societies, states, histories, geographies, cultures. On the other hand, “Islam” is peculiarly traumatic news today in the West, for reasons that I discuss in the course of this book. During the past few years, especially since events in Iran caught European and American attention so strongly, the media have therefore covered Islam: they have portrayed it,

characterized it, analyzed it, given instant courses on it, and consequently they have made it “known.”

But, as I have implied, this coverage—and with it the work of academic experts on Islam, geopolitical strategists who speak of “the crescent of crisis,” cultural thinkers who deplore “the decline of the West”—is misleadingly full. It has given consumers of news the sense that they have understood Islam without at the same time intimating to them that a great deal in this energetic coverage is based on far from objective material. In many instances “Islam” has licensed not only patent inaccuracy but also expressions of unrestrained ethnocentrism, cultural and even racial hatred, deep yet paradoxically free-floating hostility. All this has taken place as part of what is presumed to be fair, balanced, responsible coverage of Islam. Aside from the fact that neither Christianity nor Judaism, both of them going through quite remarkable revivals (or “returns”), is treated in so emotional a way, there is an unquestioned assumption that Islam can be characterized limitlessly by means of a handful of recklessly general and repeatedly deployed clichés. And always it is supposed that the “Islam” being talked about is some real and stable object out there where “our” oil supplies happen to be found.

With this sort of coverage has gone a great deal of covering up. When the *New York Times* explains a surprisingly strong Iranian resistance to Iraq’s incursion, it resorts to a formula about the “Shi’a penchant for martyrdom.” Superficially, phrases like that have a certain plausibility, but in fact I think they are used to cover a great deal of what the reporter knows nothing about. Not knowing the language is only part of a much greater ignorance, for often enough the reporter is sent to a strange country with no preparation or experience, just because he or she is canny at picking up things quickly or happens already to be in the general vicinity of where front-page news is happening. So instead of trying to find out more about the country, the reporter takes hold of what is nearest at hand, usually a cliché or some bit of journalistic wisdom that

readers at home are unlikely to challenge. With approximately three hundred reporters in Teheran during the first days of the hostage crisis, and without a Persian-speaker among them, it was no wonder that all the media reports coming out of Iran repeated essentially the same threadbare accounts of what was taking place; in the meantime, of course, other events and political processes in Iran that could not easily be characterized as instances of "the Islamic mentality" or of "anti-Americanism" went unnoticed.

Between them, the activities of *covering* and *covering up* Islam have almost eliminated consideration of the predicament of which they are symptoms: the general problem of knowing and living in a world that has become far too complex and various for easy and instant generalizations. Islam is both a typical case and, because its history in the West is so old and well defined, a special one. By this I mean that like so much of the postcolonial world, Islam belongs neither to Europe nor, like Japan, to the advanced industrial group of nations. It has been regarded as falling within the purview of "development perspectives," which is another mode of saying that Islamic societies were considered for at least three decades to be in need of "modernization." The ideology of modernization produced a way of seeing Islam whose apex and culmination was the image of the shah of Iran, both at his zenith, as a "modern" ruler, and when his regime collapsed, as a casualty to what was looked upon as medieval fanaticism and religiosity.

On the other hand, "Islam" has always represented a particular menace to the West, for reasons I discussed in *Orientalism* and re-examine in this book. Of no other religion or cultural grouping can it be said so assertively as it is now said of Islam that it represents a threat to Western civilization. It is no accident that the turbulence and the upheavals which are now taking place in the Muslim world (and which have more to do with social, economic, and historical factors than they do unilaterally with Islam) have exposed the limita-

tions of simple-minded Orientalist clichés about "fatalistic" Muslims *without* at the same time generating anything to put in their place except nostalgia for the old days, when European armies ruled almost the entire Muslim world, from the Indian subcontinent right across to North Africa. The recent success of books, journals, and public figures that argue for a reoccupation of the Gulf region and justify the argument by referring to Islamic barbarism is part of this phenomenon. It is no less remarkable that the times have seen the emergence into American fame of "experts" like New Zealand's J. B. Kelly, former professor of imperial history at Wisconsin, one-time adviser to Sheikh Zayid of Abu Dhabi,³ now critical of Muslims and soft Westerners who, unlike Kelly, have sold out to the oil Arabs. Not a single one of the occasionally critical reviews of his book had anything to say about the astonishingly frank atavism of his concluding paragraph, which for its sheer desire of imperial conquest and its barely concealed racial attitudes deserves quotation here:

How much time may be left to Western Europe in which to preserve or recover its strategic inheritance east of Suez it is impossible to foretell. While the *pax Britannica* endured, that is to say, from the fourth or fifth decade of the nineteenth century to the middle years of this century, tranquility reigned in the Eastern Seas and around the shores of the Western Indian Ocean. An ephemeral calm still lingers there, the vestigial shadow of the old imperial order. If the history of the past four or five hundred years indicates anything, however, it is that this fragile peace cannot last much longer. Most of Asia is fast lapsing back into despotism, most of Africa into barbarism—into the condition, in short, they were in when Vasco da Gama first doubled the Cape to lay the foundations of Portuguese dominion in the East. . . . Oman is still the key to command of the Gulf and its seaward approaches, just as Aden remains the key to the passage of the Red Sea. The Western powers have already thrown away one of these keys; the other, however, is still within their reach. Whether, like the

captains-general of Portugal long ago, they have the boldness to grasp it has yet to be seen.⁴

Although Kelly's suggestion that fifteenth- and sixteenth-century Portuguese colonialism is the most appropriate guide for contemporary Western politicians may strike some readers as a little quaint, it is his simplifications of history that are most representative of the current mood. Colonialism brought tranquillity, he says, as if the subjugation of millions of people amounted to no more than an idyll and as if those were their best days; their abused feelings, their distorted history, their unhappy destiny do not matter, so long as "we" can continue to get what is useful to "us"—valuable resources, geographically and politically strategic regions, a vast pool of cheap native labor. The independence of countries in Africa and Asia after centuries of colonial dominion is dismissed as lapsing into barbarism or despotism. The only course left open, after what he characterizes as the craven demise of the old imperial order, is a new invasion according to Kelly. And underlying this invitation to the West to take what is rightfully "ours" is a profound contempt for the native Islamic culture of the Asia Kelly wishes "us" to rule.

Let us charitably leave aside the retrograde logic of Kelly's writing, which has brought him the respectful accolades of the American intellectual right wing from William F. Buckley to the *New Republic*. What is more interesting about the outlook he presents is how blanket solutions to messy, detailed problems are immediately preferred to anything else, especially when they recommend forceful action against "Islam." No one says what might be taking place inside Yemen, for example, or in Turkey, or across the Red Sea in Sudan, Mauritania, Morocco, or even Egypt. Silence in the press, which is busy covering the hostage crisis; silence in the academy, which is busy advising the oil industry and the government on how to forecast trends in the Gulf; silence in the government, which looks for information only where "our" friends (such as the shah or Anwar Sadat) direct us to look

for it. "Islam" is only what holds the West's oil reserves; little else counts, little else deserves attention.

Given the current state of academic studies of Islam, there is not too much to be found there by way of rectification. In some ways the field as a whole is marginal to the general culture, while in others it is easily co-opted by the government and the corporations. Generally, this has disqualified it to cover Islam in ways that might tell us more than we are otherwise aware of beneath the surface of Islamic societies. Then too, there are numerous methodological and intellectual problems that still need settling: Is there such a thing as Islamic behavior? What connects Islam at the level of everyday life to Islam at the level of doctrine in the various Islamic societies? How really useful is "Islam" as a concept for understanding Morocco and Saudi Arabia and Syria and Indonesia? If we come to realize that, as many scholars have recently noted, Islamic doctrine can be seen as justifying capitalism as well as socialism, militancy as well as fatalism, ecumenism as well as exclusivism, we begin to sense the tremendous lag between academic descriptions of Islam (that are inevitably caricatured in the media) and the particular realities to be found within the Islamic world.

Yet there is a consensus on "Islam" as a kind of scapegoat for everything we do not happen to like about the world's new political, social, and economic patterns. For the right, Islam represents barbarism; for the left, medieval theocracy; for the center, a kind of distasteful exoticism. In all camps, however, there is agreement that even though little enough is known about the Islamic world there is not much to be approved of there. What there is of value in Islam is principally its anticommunism, with the additional irony that almost invariably anticommunism in the Islamic world has been synonymous with repressive pro-American regimes. Pakistan's Zia al-Haq is a perfect case in point.

Far from being a defense of Islam—a project as unlikely as it is futile for my purposes—this book describes the uses of

"Islam" for the West and, though I spend less time doing it, for many Islamic societies. Thus to criticize the abuses of Islam in the West does not by any means entail condoning them within Islamic societies. The fact is that in many—too many—Islamic societies repression, the abrogation of personal freedoms, unrepresentative and often minority regimes, are either falsely legitimated or casuistically explained with reference to Islam, which is doctrinally as blameless in this regard as any other of the great universal religions. The abuses of Islam also happen to correspond in many instances with the inordinate power and authority of the central state.

Nevertheless I believe that even if we do not blame everything that is unhealthy about the Islamic world on the West, we must be able to see the connection between what the West has been saying about Islam and what, reactively, various Muslim societies have done. The dialectic between the two—given that for many parts of the Islamic world the West, whether as former colonizing power or as present trading partner, is a very important interlocutor—has produced a species of what Thomas Franck and Edward Weisband have called "word politics,"⁷ which it is the purpose of this book to analyze and explain. The back-and-forth between the West and Islam, the challenging and the answering, the opening of certain rhetorical spaces and the closing of others: all this makes up the "word politics" by which each side sets up situations, justifies actions, forecloses options, and presses alternatives on the other. Thus when Iranians seized the United States Embassy in Teheran they were responding, not just to the former shah's entry into the United States, but to what they perceived as a long history of humiliation inflicted on them by superior American power: past American actions "spoke" to them of constant intervention in their lives, and therefore as Muslims who, they felt, had been held prisoner in their own country, they took American prisoners and held them as hostages on United States territory, the Teheran embassy. Although the actions themselves made the point, it was the words, and the movements of power they adumbrated, that

prepared the way and, to a very great extent, made the actions possible.

This pattern is, I think, of very great importance because it underscores the close affiliation between language and political reality, at least so far as discussions of Islam are concerned. The hardest thing to get most academic experts on Islam to admit is that what they say and do as scholars is set in a profoundly and in some ways an offensively political context. Everything about the study of Islam in the contemporary West is saturated with political importance, but hardly any writers on Islam, whether expert or general, admit the fact in what they say. Objectivity is assumed to inhere in learned discourse about other societies, despite the long history of political, moral, and religious concern felt in all societies, Western or Islamic, about the alien, the strange and different. In Europe, for example, the Orientalist has traditionally been affiliated directly with colonial offices: what we have just begun to learn about the extent of close cooperation between scholarship and direct military colonial conquest (as in the case of the revered Dutch Orientalist C. Snouck Hurgronje, who used the confidence he had won from Muslims to plan and execute the brutal Dutch war against the Atjehnese people of Sumatra⁸) is both edifying and depressing. Yet books and articles continue to pour forth extolling the nonpolitical nature of Western scholarship, the fruits of Orientalist learning, and the value of "objective" expertise. At the very same time there is scarcely an expert on "Islam" who has not been a consultant or even an employee of the government, the various corporations, the media. My point is that the cooperation must be admitted and taken into account, not just for moral reasons, but for intellectual reasons as well.

Let us say that discourse on Islam is, if not absolutely vitiated, then certainly colored by the political, economic, and intellectual situation in which it arises: this is as true of East as it is of West. For many evident reasons, it is not too much of an exaggeration to say that *all* discourse on Islam has an interest in some authority or power. On the other hand, I do not

mean to say that all scholarship or writing about Islam is therefore useless. Quite the contrary; I think it is more useful than not, and very revealing as an index of what interest is being served. I cannot say for sure whether in matters having to do with human society there is such a thing as absolute truth or perfectly true knowledge; perhaps such things exist in the abstract—a proposition I do not find hard to accept—but in present reality truth about such matters as “Islam” is relative to who produces it. It will be noted that such a position does not rule out gradations of knowledge (good, bad, indifferent), nor the possibility of saying things accurately. It simply asks that anyone speaking about “Islam” remember what any beginning student of literature knows: that the writing or reading of texts about human reality brings into play many more factors than can be accounted for (or protected) by labels like “objective.”

This is why I take pains to identify the situation out of which statements arise, and why it seems important to note the various groups in society that have an interest in “Islam.” For the West generally and the United States in particular, the confluence of power bearing upon “Islam” is notable, as much for its component groups (the academy, the corporations, the media, the government) as for the relative absence of dissent from the orthodoxy it has created. The result has been a gross simplification of “Islam,” so that numerous manipulative aims can be realized, from the stirring up of a new cold war, to the instigation of racial antipathy, to mobilization for a possible invasion, to the continued denigration of Muslims and Arabs.⁷ Little of this is, I believe, in the interest of truth; certainly the truth of these manipulative aims is always denied. Instead we have the statements made and the aims served with a shroud of scholarly, even scientific expertise draped over them. An amusing consequence is that when Muslim countries donate money to American universities for Arab or Islamic studies, a great liberal outcry arises about foreign interference in the American university, but when Japan or Germany donates money no such complaint can be

heard. As for the impact of corporate pressures on the university, that too is generally regarded as being in the salutary nature of things.⁸

Let I seem to conform too closely to Oscar Wilde's definition of a cynic—that he knows the price of everything and the value of nothing—I should say finally that I recognize the need for informed expert opinion; that the United States as a great power is likely to have attitudes to and therefore policies for the outside world that smaller powers do not; that there is great hope for improvement in the dismal situation now prevailing. Nevertheless I do not believe as strongly and as firmly in the notion of “Islam” as many experts, policy-makers, and general intellectuals do; on the contrary, I often think it has been more of a hindrance than a help in understanding what moves people and societies. But what I really believe in is the existence of a critical sense and of citizens able and willing to use it to get beyond the special interests of experts and their *idées reçues*. By using the skills of a good critical reader to disentangle sense from nonsense, by asking the right questions and expecting pertinent answers, anyone can learn about either “Islam” or the world of Islam and about the men, women, and cultures that live within it, speak its languages, breathe its air, produce its histories and societies. At that point, humanistic knowledge begins and communal responsibility for that knowledge begins to be shouldered. I wrote this book to advance that goal.

Parts of Chapter One and Chapter Two have appeared in *The Nation* and the *Columbia Journalism Review*. I am particularly grateful to Robert Manoff, who during his all-too-brief tenure as editor of the *Columbia Journalism Review* made it an exciting publication.

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E.W.S.
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POSTSCRIPT

On January 20, 1981, the fifty-two Americans held prisoner in the United States Embassy for 444 days finally left Iran. A few days later they arrived in the United States to be greeted by the country's genuine happiness in seeing them back. The "hostage return," as it came to be called, became a week-long media event. There were many frequently intrusive and maudlin hours of live television coverage as the "returnees" were transported to Algeria, then to Germany, then to West Point, to Washington, and at last to their various home towns.

Most newspapers and national weeklies ran supplements on the return, ranging from learned analyses of how the final agreement between Iran and the United States was arrived at, and what it involved, to celebrations of American heroism and Iranian barbarism. Interspersed were personal stories of the hostage ordeal, often embroidered by enterprising journalists and what seemed an alarmingly available number of psychiatrists eager to explain what the hostages were *really* going through. Insofar as there was serious discussion of the past and of the future that went beyond the level of the yellow ribbons designated as symbolic of Iranian captivity, the new administration set the tone and determined the limits. Analysis of the past was focused on whether the United States should have made (and whether it ought to honor) the agreement with Iran. On January 31, 1981, the *New Republic* predictably attacked "the ransom," and the Carter administration for giving in to terrorists; then it condemned the whole "legally controvertible proposition" of dealing with Iranian demands, as well as the use as intermediary of Algeria, a country "well practiced at giving refuge to terrorists and laundering the ransoms they bring." Discussion of the future was constrained by the Reagan administration's declared war on terrorism; this, not human rights, was to be the new priority of United States policy, even to the extent of supporting "moderately repressive regimes" if they happen to be allies.

Accordingly, Peter C. Stuart reported in the *Christian Science Monitor* of January 29, 1981, that congressional hearings were likely to be scheduled on "the terms of the hostage release agreement . . . treatment of the hostages . . . embassy security . . . [and as a kind of afterthought] future U.S.-Iran relations." Very much in keeping with the narrowly focused range of problems explored by the media during the crisis (with few exceptions), there was no careful scrutiny of what the Iranian trauma has meant, what it suggests about the future, what might be learned from it. The London *Sunday Times* reported on January 26 that before he left office Presi-

dent Carter allegedly advised the State Department to "focus all public attention on building up a wave of resentment against the Iranians." Whether or not this was in fact true, it appeared to be plausible at least, since no public official and few columnists and journalists were interested in reevaluating the long American history of intervention in Iran and other parts of the Islamic world. There was much talk of stationing forces in the Middle East; conversely, when the Islamic summit was held in Taif during the last week in January, the United States media all but ignored it.

Ideas about retribution and loud assertions of American force were accompanied by a symphonic elaboration of the hostages' ordeal and triumphant return. The victims were directly transmuted into heroes (understandably upsetting various veterans' and former-POW groups) and symbols of freedom, their captors into subhuman beasts. To this end the *New York Times* said editorially on January 22, "let there be rage and revulsion in those first hours of release," and then, having reflected for a while, came up with the following questions on January 28: "What should have been done? Mining harbors, or landing marines, or dropping a few bombs might frighten rational foes. But was Iran—is Iran—rational?" Certainly, as Fred Halliday wrote in the *Los Angeles Times* on January 25, there was much to be critical of in Iran, religion and unceasing revolutionary turmoil having proved incapable of providing a modern state with the kind of day-to-day decisions likely to benefit the population at large. Internationally Iran was isolated and vulnerable. And certainly it was just as clear that the students at the embassy had not been gentle with their prisoners. Yet not even the fifty-two themselves went so far as to say that they had been tortured or systematically brutalized: this emerges in the transcript of their news conference at West Point (see the *New York Times*, January 28), where Elizabeth Swift says quite explicitly that *Newsweek* lied about what she said, inventing a story about torture (much amplified by the media) that had nothing to do with the facts.

It was the leap from a specific experience—unpleasant, anguished, miserably long in duration—to huge generalizations about Iran and Islam that the hostage return licensed in the media and in the culture at large. Once again, in other words, the political dynamics of a complex historical experience were simply effaced in the service of an extraordinary amnesia. We were back to the old basics. Iranians were reduced to "fundamentalist screwballs" by Bob Ingle in the *Atlanta Constitution* on January 23; Claire Sterling in the *Washington Post* on January 23 argued that the Iran story was an aspect of "Fright Decade I," the war against civilization by terrorists. To Bill Green on the same page of the *Post*, "the Iranian obscenity" raised the possibility that "freedom of the press," which presented news about Iran, might be "perverted into a weapon aimed directly at the heart of American nationalism and self-esteem." This remarkable combination of confidence and insecurity is somewhat deflated by Green when he asks a little later whether the press helped "us" to understand "the Iranians' revolution," a question easily answered by Martin Kondracke in the *Wall Street Journal*, January 29, who wrote that "American television [with scant exceptions] treated the Iran crisis either as a freak show, featuring self-flagellants and fist-wavers, or as a soap opera."

There were some journalists, however, who were genuinely reflective. H. D. S. Greenway acknowledged in the *Boston Globe* on January 21 that "there was damage done to U.S. interests by the American obsession with the hostage crisis to the exclusion of other, pressing issues," but he was able to arrive at one clear conclusion: "The realities of a pluralistic world will not change and the new Administration will be bound by the practical limits of power in the late 20th century." Writing in the *Globe* on the same day, Steven Erlanger praised Carter for having defused the crisis and thereby succeeded in making the debate conducive to "less passion and more reason." For its part, the *New Republic* (January 31) censured "the ever-accommodating *Globe*," which is to say

that Iran is best treated as an aberration in the process of rebuilding American power and of fighting communism. Indeed, this essentially militant line was elevated to the rank of quasi-official American ideology. In "The Purposes of American Power" (*Foreign Affairs*, Winter 1980-81) Robert W. Tucker claims to be steering a new course between proponents of "resurgent America" and "isolationism." Yet for the Persian Gulf and Central America he proposes a policy of frank interventionism since, he says, the United States can "allow" neither changes in internal order there nor the spread of Soviet influence. In either event, it would be up to the United States to decide what constitutes allowable and nonallowable changes. Thus a like-minded colleague, Richard Pipes of Harvard, suggested that the new administration reclassify the world into two simple camps: procommunist nations and anti-communist nations.

If the return to the cold war seems on one level to entail a new assertiveness, it has also encouraged a renaissance of self-delusion. Enemies include anyone who asks the West to consider its past, not so much out of guilt as out of self-awareness: such people are simply to be ignored. A symbolically powerful instance of this took place during the West Point press conference. A person in the audience declared that it was "the height of hypocrisy for the United States government to talk about torture" when the United States had abetted the mutilation of Iranians during the Pahlavi era. Bruce Laingen, the Teheran embassy's *chargé d'affaires* and the United States' senior diplomat in Iran, said twice that he had not heard the question, then moved rapidly to the more congenial subject of Iranian brutality and American innocence.

No expert, media personality, or government official seemed to wonder what might have happened if a small fraction of the time spent on isolating, dramatizing, and covering the unlawful embassy seizure and the hostage return had been spent exposing oppression and brutality during the ex-shah's regime. Was there no limit to the idea of using the vast infor-

mation-gathering apparatus to inform the justifiably anxious public about what was really taking place in Iran? Did the alternatives have to be limited either to stirring up patriotic feelings or to fueling a kind of mass anger at crazy Iran?

These are not idle questions, now that this lamentably exaggerated episode is over. It will be beneficial as well as practical for Americans in particular, Westerners in general, to puzzle out the changing configurations in world politics. Is "Islam" going to be confined to the role of terroristic oil-supplier? Are journals and investigations to focus on "who lost Iran," or will debate and reflection be better employed around topics more suited to world community and peaceful development?

Hints of how the media, for example, might responsibly use their enormous capability for public information were to be found in the three-hour special broadcast by ABC, "The Secret Negotiations," on January 22 and 28, 1981. In exposing the various methods used to free the hostages, the broadcasts put forth an impressive amount of unknown material, little of it more telling than those moments when unconscious and deep-seated attitudes were suddenly illuminated.

One such moment occurs when Christian Bourguet describes his late March 1980 meeting with Jimmy Carter at the White House. Bourguet, a French lawyer with ties to the Iranians, acted as an intermediary between the United States and Iran; he had come to Washington because, despite an arrangement worked out with the Panamanians to arrest the ex-shah, the deposed ruler had left suddenly for Egypt. So they were back to square one:

BOURGUET: At a given moment [Carter] spoke of the hostages, saying, you understand that these are Americans. These are innocents. I said to him, yes, Mr. President, I understand that you say they are innocent. But I believe you have to understand that for the Iranians they aren't innocent. Even if personally none of them has committed an act, they are not innocent because they

are diplomats who represent a country that has done a number of things in Iran.

You must understand that it is not against their person that the action is being taken. Of course, you can see that. They have not been harmed. They have not been hurt. No attempt has been made to kill them. You must understand that it is a symbol, that it is on the plane of symbols that we have to think about this matter.*

In fact Carter does seem to have viewed the embassy seizure in symbolic terms, but unlike the Frenchman, he had his own frame of reference. To him Americans were by definition innocent and in a sense outside history: Iran's grievances against the United States, he would say on another occasion, were ancient history. What mattered now was that Iranians were terrorists, and perhaps had always been potentially a terrorist nation. Indeed, anyone who disliked America and held Americans captive was dangerous and sick, beyond rationality, beyond humanity, beyond common decency.

Carter's inability to connect what some foreigners felt about the United States' longstanding support for local dictators with what was happening to the Americans held unlawfully in Teheran is extraordinarily symptomatic. Even if one completely opposes the hostage-taking, and even if one has only positive feelings about the hostages' return, there are alarming lessons to be learned from what seems like the official national tendency to be oblivious to certain realities. All relationships between people and nations involve two sides. Nothing at all enjoins "us" to like or approve of "them," but we must at least recognize (a) that "they" are there, and (b) that so far as "they" are concerned "we" are what we are, plus what they have experienced and known of us. This is not a matter of innocence or guilt, nor of patriotism and treason. Neither side commands reality so totally as to disregard the other. Unless, of course, we believe as Americans that whereas the other side is ontologically guilty, we are innocent.

Consider now, as another item usefully presented by the

media, the confidential cable sent from Teheran by Bruce Laingen to Secretary of State Vance on August 13, 1979, a document entirely consistent with Carter's attitude in his conversations with Bourguet. It was published on the *New York Times* op-ed page January 27, 1981, perhaps to help focus the nation on what Iranians are really like, perhaps only as an ironic footnote to the recently ended crisis. Yet Laingen's message is not a scientific account of "the Persian psyche" he discusses, despite the author's pretense to calm objectivity and to expert knowledge of the culture. The text is rather an ideological statement designed, I think, to turn "Persia" into a timeless, acutely disturbing essence, thereby enhancing the superior morality and national sanity of the American half of the negotiations. Thus each assertion about "Persia" adds damaging evidence to the profile while shielding "America" from scrutiny and analysis.

This self-blinding is accomplished rhetorically in two ways that are worth looking at closely. First, history is eliminated unilaterally: "the effects of the Iranian revolution" are set aside in the interests of the "relatively constant . . . cultural and psychological qualities" underlying "the Persian psyche." Hence modern Iran becomes ageless Persia. The unscientific version of this operation has Italians becoming dagoes, Jews yids, blacks niggers, and so on. (How refreshingly honest is the street-fighter as compared with the polite diplomat!) Second, the "Persian" national character is portrayed with reference only to the Iranians' imagined (i.e., paranoid) sense of reality. Laingen neither credits the Iranians' experience of real treachery and suffering nor grants them the right to have arrived at a view of the United States based on what, as they see it, the United States actually did in Iran. This is not to say that the United States did *not* do anything in Iran; it only means that the United States is entitled to do what it pleases, without irrelevant complaints or reactions from Iranians. The only thing that counts for Laingen in Iran is the *constant* "Persian psyche" that overrides all other realities.

Most readers of the Laingen message will concede as

* Transcript provided courtesy of Veronica Pollard, ABC, New York.

doubtless he does too, that one should not reduce other people or societies to such a simple and stereotypical core. We do not today allow that public discourse should treat blacks and Jews that way, just as we would (and do) laugh off Iranian portrayals of America as the Great Satan. Too simple, too ideological, too racist. But for this particular enemy, Persia, the reduction serves, as it did when the *New Republic's* Martin Peretz reproduced a page of manifestly racist prose (February 7, 1981) by a seventeenth-century Englishman on "The Turk," called it a "classic" for students of Middle Eastern culture, and then said it tells us how Muslims behave. One wonders how Peretz would react if a page of seventeenth-century prose on "The Jew" were printed today as a guide for understanding "Jewish" behavior. The question is what exactly such documents as Laingen's or Peretz's serve if, as I shall argue, they neither teach one anything about Islam or Iran nor, given the existing tension between the United States and Iran after the revolution, have helped to guide Western actions there.

Laingen's argument is that no matter what happens, there is a "Persian proclivity" to resist "the very concept of a rational (from the Western point of view) negotiating process." We can be rational: Persians cannot. Why? Because, he says, they are overridingly egoistical; reality for them is malevolent; the "bazaar mentality" urges immediate advantage over long-term gain; the omnipotent god of Islam makes it impossible for them to understand causality; for them words and reality are not connected. In sum, according to the five lessons he abstracts from his analysis, Laingen's "Persian" is an unreliable negotiator, having neither a sense of "the other side," nor a capacity for trust nor for good will, nor character enough to carry out what his words promise.

The elegance of this modest proposal is that literally everything imputed to the Persian or Muslim, without any evidence at all, can be applied to "the American," that quasi-fictional, unnamed author behind the message. Who but "the

American" denies history and reality in saying unilaterally that these mean nothing to "the Persian"? Now play the following parlor game: find a major Judeo-Christian cultural and social equivalent for the traits that Laingen ascribes to "the Persian." Overriding egoism? Rousseau. Malevolence of reality? Kafka. Omnipotence of God? Old and New Testaments. Lack of causal sense? Beckett. Bazaar mentality? The New York Stock Exchange. Confusion between words and reality? Austin and Searle. But few people would construct a portrait of the essential West using only Christopher Lasch on narcissism, the words of a fundamentalist preacher, Plato's *Cratylus*, an advertising jingle or two, and (as a case of the West's inability to believe in a stable or beneficent reality) Ovid's *Metamorphoses* laced with choice verses from Leviticus.

Laingen's message is a functional equivalent of such a portrait. In a different context it would appear a caricature at best, a crude and not particularly damaging attack at worst. It is not even effective as a bit of psy-war, since it reveals the writer's weaknesses more than his opponent's. It shows, for example, that the author is extremely nervous about his opposite number, and that he cannot see others except as a mirror image of himself. Where is his capacity for understanding the Iranian point of view or for that matter the Islamic Revolution itself, which one would suppose had been the direct result of intolerable Persian tyranny and the need for overthrowing it?

And as for good will and trust in the rationality of the negotiating process, even if the events of 1953 were not mentioned, much could be said about the attempted army coup against the revolution, directly encouraged by the United States' General Huyser in late January 1979. Then too, there was the action of various United States banks (unusually compliant in bending the rules to suit the shah) who during 1979 were prepared to cancel Iranian loans contracted in 1977 on the grounds that Iran had not paid the interest on time; *Le Monde's* Eric Rouleau reported on November

25-26, 1979, that he had seen proof that Iran had actually paid the interest *ahead* of time. No wonder "the Persian" assumes his opposite number is an adversary. He *is* an adversary, and an insecure one at that: Laingen says it plainly.

But let us concede that the issue is not fairness but accuracy. The United States' man-on-the-spot is advising Washington. What does he rely on? A handful of Orientalist clichés that could have been taken verbatim from Sir Alfred Lyall's description of the Eastern mind, or from Lord Cromer's account of dealing with the natives in Egypt. If according to Laingen, Ibrahim Yazdi, then foreign minister of Iran, resists the idea that "Iranian behavior has consequences on the perception of Iran in the United States," which American decision-maker was prepared to accept in advance that American behavior had consequences on the perception of the United States in Iran? Why then was the shah admitted here? Or do we, like the Persians, have an "aversion to accepting responsibility for one's own action"?

Laingen's message is the product of uninformed, unintelligent power and certainly adds little to one's understanding of other societies. As an instance of how we might confront the world, it does not inspire confidence. As an inadvertent *American* self-portrait it is frankly insulting. What use is it, then? It tells us how United States representatives, and with them a good part of the Orientalist establishment, have created a reality that corresponds neither to our world nor to Iran's. But if it does not also demonstrate how such misrepresentations had better be thrown away forever, then Americans are in for more international troubles and, alas, their innocence will again be uselessly offended.

Granted that Iran and the United States have undergone wrenching unpleasantness, and granted too that the embassy seizure turned out to be an index of an overall Iranian lapse into unproductive, retrogressive chaos. Still, there is no need complacently to glean insufficient wisdom from recent history. The fact is that change is taking place in "Islam" much as it is

taking place in "the West." The modes and paces are different, but some dangers and some uncertainties are similar. As rallying cries for their constituencies, "Islam" and "the West" (or "America") provide incitement more than insight. As equal and opposite reactions to the disorientations of new actualities, "Islam" and "the West" can turn analysis into simple polemic, experience into fantasy. Respect for the concrete detail of human experience, understanding that arises from viewing the Other compassionately, knowledge gained and diffused through moral and intellectual honesty: surely these are better, if not easier, goals at present than confrontation and reductive hostility. And if in the process we can dispose finally of both the residual hatred and the offensive generality of labels like "the Muslim," "the Persian," "the Turk," "the Arab," or "the Westerner," then so much the better.

E.W.S.

February 9, 1981


New York

COVERING ISLAM

CHAPTER ONE

ISLAM AS NEWS

I. *Islam and the West*

 In order to make a point about alternative energy sources for Americans, Consolidated Edison of New York (Con Ed) ran a striking television advertisement in the summer of 1980. Film clips of various immediately recognizable OPEC personalities—Yamani, Qaddafi, lesser-known robed Arab figures—alternated with stills as well as clips of other people associated with oil and Islam: Khomeini, Arafat, Hafez al-Assad. None of these figures was mentioned by name, but we were told ominously that “these men” control America’s sources of oil. The solemn voice-over in the background made no reference to who “these men” actually are or where they come from, leaving it to be felt that this all-male cast of villains has placed Americans in the grip of an unrestrained sadism. It was enough for “these men” to appear as they have appeared in newspapers and on television for American viewers to feel a combination of anger, resentment, and fear. And it is this combination of feelings that Con Ed instantly aroused and exploited for domestic commercial reasons, just as a year earlier Stuart Eizenstat, President Carter’s domestic policy adviser, had urged the president that “with strong steps we

a region of the world that is commonly regarded as volatile and strategically vital. An important ally, it lost its imperial regime, its army, its value in American global calculations during a year of tumultuous revolutionary upheaval virtually unprecedented on so huge a scale since October 1917. A new order which called itself Islamic, and appeared to be popular and anti-imperialist, was struggling to be born. Ayatollah Khomeini's image and presence took over the media, which failed to make much of him except that he was obdurate, powerful, and deeply angry at the United States. Finally, as a result of the ex-shah's entry into the United States on October 22, 1979, the United States Embassy in Teheran was captured by a group of students on November 4; many American hostages were held. This crisis nears its end as I write.

Reactions to what took place in Iran did not occur in a vacuum. Further back in the public's subliminal cultural consciousness, there was the longstanding attitude to Islam, the Arabs, and the Orient in general that I have been calling Orientalism. For whether one looked at such recent, critically acclaimed fiction as V. S. Naipaul's *A Bend in the River* and John Updike's *The Coup*, or at grade-school history textbooks, comic strips, television serials, films, and cartoons, the iconography of Islam was uniform, was uniformly ubiquitous, and drew its material from the same time-honored view of Islam: hence the frequent caricatures of Muslims as oil suppliers, as terrorists, and more recently, as bloodthirsty mobs. Conversely, there has been very little place either in the culture generally or in discourse about non-Westerners in particular to speak or even to think about, much less to portray, Islam or anything Islamic sympathetically. Most people, if asked to name a *modern* Islamic writer, would probably be able to pick only Khalil Gibran (who wasn't Islamic). The academic experts whose specialty is Islam have generally treated the religion and its various cultures within an invented or culturally determined ideological framework filled with passion, defensive prejudice, sometimes even revulsion; be-

cause of this framework, *understanding* of Islam has been a very difficult thing to achieve. And to judge from the various in-depth media studies and interviews on the Iranian revolution during the spring of 1979, there has been little inclination to accept the revolution itself as much more than a defeat for the United States (which in a very specific sense, of course, it was), or a victory of dark over light.

V. S. Naipaul's role in helping to clarify this general hostility towards Islam is an interesting one. In a recent interview published in *Newsweek International* (August 18, 1980) he spoke about a book he was writing on "Islam," and then volunteered that "Muslim fundamentalism has no intellectual substance to it, therefore it must collapse." What Muslim fundamentalism he was referring to specifically, and what sort of intellectual substance he had in mind, he did not say: Iran was undoubtedly meant, but so too—in equally vague terms—was the whole postwar wave of Islamic anti-imperialism in the Third World, for which Naipaul has developed a particularly intense antipathy. In *Guerrillas* and *A Bend in the River*, Naipaul's last two novels, Islam is in question, and it is part of Naipaul's general (and with liberal Western readers, popular) indictment of the Third World that he lumps together the corrupt viciousness of a few grotesque rulers, the end of European colonialism, and postcolonial efforts at rebuilding native societies as instances of an over-all intellectual failure in Africa and Asia. "Islam" plays a major part according to Naipaul, whether it is in the use of Islamic surnames by pathetic West Indian guerrillas, or in the vestiges of the African slave trade. For Naipaul and his readers, "Islam" somehow is made to cover everything that one most disapproves of from the standpoint of civilized, and Western, rationality.³

It is as if discriminations between religious passion, a struggle for a just cause, ordinary human weakness, political competition, and the history of men, women, and societies seen as the history of men, women, and societies cannot be made when "Islam," or the Islam now at work in Iran and in

other parts of the Muslim world, is dealt with by novelists, reporters, policy-makers, "experts." "Islam" seems to engulf all aspects of the diverse Muslim world, reducing them all to a special malevolent and unthinking essence. Instead of analysis and understanding as a result, there can be for the most part only the crudest form of us-versus-them. Whatever Iranians or Muslims say about their sense of justice, their history of oppression, their vision of their own societies, seems irrelevant; what counts for the United States instead is what the "Islamic revolution" is doing right now, how many people have been executed by the Komitahs, how many bizarre outrages the Ayatollah, in the name of Islam, has ordered. Of course no one has equated the Jonestown massacre or the destructive frenzy produced at the Who concert in Cincinnati or the devastation of Indochina with Christianity, or with Western or American culture at large; that sort of equation has been reserved for "Islam."

Why is it that a whole range of political, cultural, social, and even economic events has often seemed reducible in so Pavlovian a way to "Islam"? What is it about "Islam" that provokes so quick and unrestrained a response? In what way do "Islam" and the Islamic world differ for Westerners from, say, the rest of the Third World and from the Soviet Union? These are far from simple questions, and they must therefore be answered piecemeal, with many qualifications and much differentiation.

Labels purporting to name very large and complex realities are notoriously vague and at the same time unavoidable. If it is true that "Islam" is an imprecise and ideologically loaded label, it is also true that "the West" and "Christianity" are just as problematic. Yet there is no easy way of avoiding these labels, since Muslims speak of Islam, Christians of Christianity, Westerners of the West, and all of them about all the others in ways that seem to be both convincing and exact. Instead of trying to propose ways of going around the labels, I think it is more immediately useful to admit at the outset that

they exist and have long been in use as an integral part of cultural history rather than as objective classifications: a little later in this chapter I shall speak about them as interpretations produced for and by what I shall call communities of interpretation. We must therefore remember that "Islam," "the West," and even "Christianity" function in at least two different ways, and produce at least two meanings, each time they are used. First, they perform a simple identifying function, as when we say Khomeini is a Muslim, or Pope John Paul II is a Christian. Such statements tell us as a bare minimum what something is, as opposed to all other things. On this level we can distinguish between an orange and an apple (as we might distinguish between a Muslim and a Christian) only to the extent that we know they are different fruits, growing on different trees, and so forth.

The second function of these several labels is to produce a much more complex meaning. To speak of "Islam" in the West today is to mean a lot of the unpleasant things I have been mentioning. Moreover, "Islam" is unlikely to mean anything one knows either directly or objectively. The same is true of our use of "the West." How many people who use the labels angrily or assertively have a solid grip on all aspects of the Western tradition, or on Islamic jurisprudence, or on the actual languages of the Islamic world? Very few, obviously, but this does not prevent people from confidently characterizing "Islam" and "the West," or from believing they know exactly what it is they are talking about.

For that reason, we must take the labels seriously. To a Muslim who talks about "the West" or to an American who talks about "Islam," these enormous generalizations have behind them a whole history, enabling and disabling at the same time. Ideological and shot through with powerful emotions, the labels have survived many experiences and have been capable of adapting to new events, information, and realities. At present, "Islam" and "the West" have taken on a powerful new urgency everywhere. And we must note immediately that

it is always the West, and not Christianity, that seems pitted against Islam. Why? Because the assumption is that whereas "the West" is greater than and has surpassed the stage of Christianity, its principal religion, the world of Islam—its varied societies, histories, and languages notwithstanding—is still mired in religion, primitivity, and backwardness. Therefore, the West is modern, greater than the sum of its parts, full of enriching contradictions and yet always "Western" in its cultural identity; the world of Islam, on the other hand, is no more than "Islam," reducible to a small number of unchanging characteristics despite the appearance of contradictions and experiences of variety that seem on the surface to be as plentiful as those of the West.

A recent example of what I mean is to be found in an article for the "News of the Week in Review" section of the Sunday *New York Times*, September 14, 1980. The piece in question is by John Kifner, the able *Times* correspondent in Beirut, and its subject is the extent of Soviet penetration of the Muslim world. Kifner's notion is evident enough from his article's title ("Marx and Mosque Are less Compatible Than Ever"), but what is noteworthy is his use of Islam to make what in any other instance would be an unacceptably direct and unqualified connection between an abstraction and a vastly complex reality. Even if it is allowed that, unlike all other religions, Islam is totalistic and makes no separation between church and state or between religion and everyday life, there is something uniquely—and perhaps deliberately—uninformed and uninforming, albeit conventional enough, about such statements as the following:

The reason for Moscow's receding influence is disarmingly simple: Marx and mosque are incompatible. [Are we to assume, then, that Marx and church, or Marx and temple, are more compatible?]

For the Western mind [this is the point, obviously enough], conditioned since the Reformation to historical and intellectual developments which have steadily diminished the role of religion,

it is difficult to grasp the power exerted by Islam [which, presumably, has been conditioned neither by history nor by intellect]. Yet, for centuries it has been the central force in the life of this region and, for the moment at least, its power seems on the upsurge.

In Islam, there is no separation between church and state. It is a total system not only of belief but of action, with fixed rules for everyday life and a messianic drive to combat or convert the infidel. To the deeply religious, particularly to the scholars and clergy but also to the masses [in other words, no one is excluded], Marxism, with its purely secular view of man, is not only alien but heretical.

Not only does Kifner simply ignore history and such complications as the admittedly limited but interesting series of parallels between Marxism and Islam (studied by Maxime Rodinson in a book that attempts to explain why Marxism seems to have made some inroads in Islamic societies over the years⁴) but he also rests his argument on a hidden comparison between "Islam" and the West, so much more various and uncharacterizable than simple, monolithic, totalitarian Islam. The interesting thing is that Kifner can say what he says without any danger of appearing either wrong or absurd.

Islam versus the West: this is the ground bass for a staggeringly fertile set of variations. Europe versus Islam, no less than America versus Islam, is a thesis that it subsumes.⁵ But quite different concrete experiences with the West as a whole play a significant role too. For there is an extremely important distinction to be made between American and European awareness of Islam. France and England, for example, until very recently possessed large Muslim empires; in both countries, and to a lesser degree in Italy and Holland, both of which had Muslim colonies too, there is a long tradition of direct experience with the Islamic world.⁶ This is reflected in a distinguished European academic discipline of Orientalism, which of course existed in those countries with colonies as well

as in those (Germany, Spain, prerevolutionary Russia) that either wanted them, or were close to Muslim territories, or were once Muslim states. Today the Soviet Union has a Muslim population of about 50 million, and since the last days of 1979 has been in military occupation of Muslim Afghanistan. None of these things is comparably true of the United States, even though never before have so many Americans written, thought, or spoken about Islam.

The absence in America either of a colonial past or of a longstanding cultural attention to Islam makes the current obsession all the more peculiar, more abstract, more second-hand. Very few Americans, comparatively speaking, have actually had much to do with real Muslims; by comparison, in France the country's second religion in point of numbers is Islam, which may not be more popular as a result, but is certainly more known. The modern European burst of interest in Islam was part of what was called "the Oriental renaissance," a period in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries when French and British scholars discovered "the East" anew—India, China, Japan, Egypt, Mesopotamia, the Holy Land. Islam was seen, for better or for worse, as part of the East, sharing in its mystery, exoticism, corruption, and latent power. True, Islam had been a direct military threat to Europe for centuries before; and true also that during the Middle Ages and early Renaissance, Islam was a problem for Christian thinkers, who continued for hundreds of years to see it and its prophet Mohammed as the rankest variety of apostasy. But at least Islam existed for many Europeans as a kind of standing religiocultural challenge, which did not prevent European imperialism from building its institutions on Islamic territory. And however much hostility there was between Europe and Islam, there was also direct experience, and in the case of poets, novelists, and scholars like Goethe, Gérard de Nerval, Richard Burton, Flaubert, and Louis Massignou, there was imagination and refinement.

Yet in spite of these figures and others like them, Islam

has never been welcome in Europe. Most of the great philosophers of history from Hegel to Spengler have regarded Islam without much enthusiasm. In a dispassionately lucid essay, "Islam and the Philosophy of History," Albert Hourani has discussed this strikingly constant derogation of Islam as a system of faith.⁷ Apart from some occasional interest in the odd Sufi writer or saint, European vogues for "the wisdom of the East" rarely included Islamic sages or poets. Omar Khayyám, Harun al-Rashid, Sindbad, Aladdin, Hajji Baba, Scheherazade, Saladin, more or less make up the entire list of Islamic figures known to modern educated Europeans. Not even Carlyle could make the Prophet widely acceptable, and as for the substance of the faith Mohammed propagated, this has long seemed to Europeans basically unacceptable on Christian grounds, although precisely for that reason not uninteresting. Towards the end of the nineteenth century, as Islamic nationalism in Asia and Africa increased, there was a widely shared view that Muslim colonies were meant to remain under European tutelage, as much because they were profitable as because they were underdeveloped and in need of Western discipline.⁸ Be that as it may, and despite the frequent racism and aggression directed at the Muslim world, Europeans *did* express a fairly energetic sense of what Islam meant to them. Hence the representations of Islam—in scholarship, art, literature, music, and public discourse—all across European culture, from the end of the eighteenth century until our own day.

Little of this concreteness is to be found in America's experience of Islam. Nineteenth-century American contacts with Islam were very restricted; one thinks of occasional travelers like Mark Twain and Herman Melville, or of missionaries here and there, or of short-lived military expeditions to North Africa. Culturally there was no distinct place in America for Islam before World War II. Academic experts did their work on Islam usually in quiet corners of schools of divinity, not in the glamorous limelight of Orientalism nor in the pages of leading journals. For about a century there has existed

a fascinating although quiet symbiosis between American missionary families to Islamic countries and cadres of the foreign service and the oil companies; periodically this has surfaced in the form of hostile comments about State Department and oil-company "Arabists," who are considered to harbor an especially virulent and anti-Semitic form of philo-Islamism. On the other hand, all the great figures known in the United States as important academic experts on Islam have been foreign-born: Lebanese Philip Hitti at Princeton, Austrian Gustave von Grunebaum at Chicago and UCLA, British H. A. R. Gibb at Harvard, German Joseph Schacht at Columbia. Yet none of these men has had the relative cultural prestige enjoyed by Jacques Berque in France and Albert Hourani in England.

But even men like Hitti, Gibb, von Grunebaum, and Schacht have disappeared from the American scene, as indeed it is unlikely that scholars such as Berque and Hourani will have successors in France and England. No one today has their breadth of culture, nor anything like their range of authority. Academic experts on Islam in the West today tend to know about jurisprudential schools in tenth-century Baghdad or nineteenth-century Moroccan urban patterns, but never (or almost never) about the whole civilization of Islam—literature, law, politics, history, sociology, and so on. This has not prevented experts from generalizing from time to time about the "Islamic mind-set" or the "Shi'a penchant for martyrdom," but such pronouncements have been confined to popular journals or to the media, which solicited these opinions in the first place. More significantly, the occasions for public discussions of Islam, by experts or by nonexperts, have almost always been provided by political crises. It is extremely rare to see informative articles on Islamic culture in the *New York Review of Books*, say, or in *Harper's*. Only when the stability of Saudi Arabia or Iran has been in question has "Islam" seemed worthy of general comment.

Consider therefore that Islam has entered the consciousness of most Americans—even of academic and general intel-

lectuals who know a great deal about Europe and Latin America—principally if not exclusively because it has been connected to newsworthy issues like oil, Iran and Afghanistan, or terrorism.⁹ And all of this by the middle of 1979 had come to be called either the Islamic revolution, or "the crescent of crisis," or "the arc of instability," or "the return of Islam." A particularly telling example was the Atlantic Council's Special Working Group on the Middle East (which included Brent Scowcroft, George Ball, Richard Helms, Lyman Lemnitzer, Walter Levy, Eugene Rostow, Kermit Roosevelt, and Joseph Sisco, among others): when this group issued its report in the fall of 1979 the title given it was "Oil and Turmoil: Western Choices in the Middle East."¹⁰ When *Time* magazine devoted its major story to Islam on April 16, 1979, the cover was adorned with a Cérôme painting of a bearded muezzin standing in a minaret, calmly summoning the faithful to prayer; it was as florid and overstated a nineteenth-century period piece of Orientalist art as one could imagine. Anachronistically, however, this quiet scene was emblazoned with a caption that had nothing to do with it: "The Militant Revival." There could be no better way of symbolizing the difference between Europe and America on the subject of Islam. A placid and decorative painting done almost routinely in Europe as an aspect of one's general culture had been transformed by three words into a general American obsession.

But surely I am exaggerating? Wasn't *Time's* cover story on Islam simply a piece of vulgarization, catering to a supposed taste for the sensational? Does it *really* reveal anything more serious than that? And since when have the media mattered a great deal on questions of substance, or of policy, or of culture? Besides, was it *not* the case that Islam had indeed thrust itself upon the world's attention? And what had happened to the experts on Islam, and why were their contributions either bypassed entirely or submerged in the "Islam" discussed and diffused by the media?

A few simple explanations are in order first. As I said

above, there has never been any American expert on the Islamic world whose audience was a wide one; moreover, with the exception of the late Marshall Hodgson's three-volume *The Venture of Islam*, posthumously published in 1975, no general work on Islam has ever been put squarely before the literate reading public.¹¹ Either the experts were so specialized that they only addressed other specialists, or their work was not distinguished enough intellectually to command the kind of audience that came to books on Japan, Western Europe, or India. But these things work both ways. While it is true that one could not name an American "Orientalist" with a reputation outside Orientalism, as compared with Berque or Rodinson in France, it is also true that the study of Islam is neither truly encouraged in the American university nor sustained in the culture at large by personalities whose fame and intrinsic merit might make their experiences of Islam important on their own.¹² Who are the American equivalents of Rebecca West, Freya Stark, T. E. Lawrence, Wilfred Thesiger, Gertrude Bell, P. H. Newby, or more recently, Jonathan Raban? At best, they might be former CIA people like Miles Copeland or Kermit Roosevelt, very rarely writers or thinkers of any cultural distinction.

A second reason for the critical absence of expert opinion on Islam is the experts' marginality to what seemed to be happening in the world of Islam when it became "news" in the mid-1970s. The brutally impressive facts are, of course, that the Gulf oil-producing states suddenly appeared to be very powerful; there was an extraordinarily ferocious and seemingly unending civil war in Lebanon; Ethiopia and Somalia were involved in a long war; the Kurdish problem unexpectedly became pivotal and then, after 1975, just as unexpectedly subsided; Iran deposed its monarch in the wake of a massive, wholly surprising "Islamic" revolution; Afghanistan was gripped by a Marxist coup in 1978, then invaded by Soviet troops in late 1979; Algeria and Morocco were drawn into protracted conflict over the Southern Sahara issue; a Pakistani

president was executed and a new military dictatorship set up. There were other things taking place too, most recently a war between Iran and Iraq, but let us be satisfied with these. On the whole I think it is fair to say that few of these happenings might have been illuminated by expert writing on Islam in the West; for not only had the experts not predicted them nor prepared their readers for them, they had instead provided a mass of literature that seemed, when compared with what was happening, to be about an impossibly distant region of the world, one that bore practically no relation to the turbulent and threatening confusion erupting before one's eyes in the media.

This is a central matter, which has scarcely begun to be discussed rationally even now, and so we should proceed carefully. Academic experts whose province was Islam before the seventeenth century worked in an essentially antiquarian field; moreover, like that of specialists in other fields, their work was very compartmentalized. They neither wanted nor tried in a responsible way to concern themselves with the modern consequences of Islamic history. To some extent their work was tied to notions of a "classical" Islam, or to supposedly unchanging patterns of Islamic life, or to archaic philological questions. In any event, there was no way of using it to understand the modern Islamic world, which to all intents and purposes, and depending on what part of it was of interest, had been developing along very different lines from those adumbrated in Islam's earliest centuries (that is, from the seventh to the ninth century).

The experts whose field was modern Islam—or to be more precise, whose field was made up of societies, people, and institutions within the Islamic world since the eighteenth century—worked within an agreed-upon framework for research formed according to notions decidedly *not* set in the Islamic world. This fact, in all its complexity and variety, cannot be overestimated. There is no denying that a scholar sitting in Oxford or Boston writes and researches principally, though not exclusively, according to standards, conventions,

and expectations shaped by his or her peers, not by the Muslims being studied. This is a truism, perhaps, but it needs emphasis just the same. Modern Islamic studies in the academy belong to "area programs" generally—Western Europe, the Soviet Union, Southeast Asia, and so on. They are therefore affiliated to the mechanism by which national policy is set. This is not a matter of choice for the individual scholar. If someone at Princeton happened to be studying contemporary Afghan religious schools, it would be obvious (especially during times like these) that such a study *could* have "policy implications," and whether or not the scholar wanted it he or she would be drawn into the network of government, corporate, and foreign-policy associations; funding would be affected, the kind of people met would also be affected, and in general, certain rewards and types of interaction would be offered. Willy-nilly, the scholar would be transmuted into an "area expert."

For scholars whose interests are directly connected to policy issues (political scientists, principally, but also modern historians, economists, sociologists, and anthropologists), there are sensitive, not to say dangerous, questions to be addressed. For example, how is one's status as a scholar reconciled with the demands made on one by governments? Iran is a perfect case in point. During the shah's regime, there were funds available to Iranologists from the Pahlevi Foundation, and of course from American institutions. These funds were disbursed for studies that took as their point of departure the status quo (in this case, the presence of a Pahlevi regime tied militarily and economically to the United States), which in a sense became the research paradigm for students of the country. Late in the crisis a House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence staff study said that the United States' assessments of the regime were influenced by existing policy "not directly, through the conscious suppression of unfavorable news, but indirectly . . . policymakers were not asking whether the Shah's autocracy would survive indefinitely; policy was prem-

ised on that assumption."¹³ This in turn produced only a tiny handful of studies seriously assessing the shah's regime and identifying the sources of popular opposition to him. To my knowledge only one scholar, Hamid Algar of Berkeley, was correct in estimating the contemporary political force of Iranian religious feelings, and only Algar went so far as to predict that Ayatollah Khomeini was likely to bring down the regime. Other scholars—Richard Cottam and Ervand Abrahamian among them—also departed from the status quo in what they wrote, but they were a small band indeed.¹⁴ (In fairness we must note that European scholars on the left, who were less sanguine about the shah's survival, did not do very well either in identifying the religious sources of Iranian opposition.¹⁵)

Even if we leave aside Iran, there were plenty of no less important intellectual failures elsewhere, all of them the result of relying uncritically on what a combination of government policy and cliché dictated. Here, the Lebanese and Palestinian cases are instructive. For years Lebanon had been regarded as a model of what a pluralistic or mosaic culture was supposed to be. Yet so reified and static had the models been which were used for the study of Lebanon that no inkling was possible of the ferocity and violence of the civil war (which ran from 1975 to 1980 at least). Expert eyes seem in the past to have been extraordinarily transfixed by images of Lebanese "stability": traditional leaders, elites, parties, national character, and successful modernization were what was studied.

Even when Lebanon's polity was described as precarious, or when its insufficient "civility" was analyzed, there was a uniform assumption that its problems were on the whole manageable and far from being radically disruptive.¹⁶ During the sixties, Lebanon was portrayed as "stable" because, one expert tells us, the "inter-Arab" situation was stable; so long as that equation was kept up, he argued, Lebanon would be secure.¹⁷ It was never even supposed that there could be inter-Arab stability and Lebanese *instability*, mainly because—as with most subjects in this consensus-ridden field—the conventional

wisdom assigned perpetual "pluralism" and harmonious continuity to Lebanon, its internal cleavages and its Arab neighbors' irrelevance notwithstanding. Any trouble for Lebanon therefore had to come from the surrounding *Arab* environment, never from Israel or from the United States, both of which had specific but never-analyzed designs on Lebanon.¹⁸ Then too, there was the Lebanon that embodied the modernization myth. Reading a classic of this sort of ostrich-wisdom today, one is struck by how serenely the fable could be advanced as recently as 1973, when the civil war had in fact begun. Lebanon might undergo revolutionary change, we were told, but that was a "remote" likelihood; what was much more likely was "future modernization involving the public [a sadly ironic euphemism for what was to be the bloodiest civil war in recent Arab history] within the prevailing political structure."¹⁹ Or as a distinguished anthropologist put it, "The Lebanese 'nice piece of mosaic' remains intact. Indeed . . . Lebanon has continued to be the most effective in containing its deep primordial cleavages."²⁰

As a result, in Lebanon and in other places, experts failed to understand that much of what truly mattered about postcolonial states could not easily be herded under the rubric of "stability." In Lebanon it was precisely those devastatingly mobile forces the experts had never documented or had consistently underestimated—social dislocations, demographic shifts, confessional loyalties, ideological currents—that tore the country apart so savagely.²¹ Similarly, it has been conventional wisdom for years to regard the Palestinians merely as resettlable refugees, not as a political force having estimable consequences for any reasonably accurate assessment of the Near East. Yet by the mid-seventies the Palestinians were one of the major acknowledged problems for United States policy, and still they had not received the scholarly and intellectual attention their importance deserved;²² instead, the persisting attitude was to treat them as adjuncts to United States policy toward Egypt and Israel and quite literally to ignore them in

the Lebanese conflagration. There has been no important *scholarly* or expert counterweight to this policy, and the results for American national interests are likely to be disastrous, especially since the Iran-Iraq war seems, once again, to have caught the intelligence community off guard and very wrong in estimates of both countries' military capacities.

Add to this conformity between a docile plodding scholarship and unfocused government interests the sorry truth that too many expert writers on the Islamic world did not command the relevant languages and hence had to depend on the press or other Western writers for their information. This reinforced dependence on the official or the conventional picture of things was a trap into which, in their over-all performance on prerevolutionary Iran, the media fell. There was a tendency to study and restudy, to focus resolutely on the same things: elites, modernization programs, the role of the military, greatly visible leaders, geopolitical strategy (from the American point of view), communist inroads.²³ Those things may at the time have seemed interesting to the United States as a nation, yet the fact is that in Iran they were all literally swept away by the revolution in a matter of days. The whole imperial court crumbled; the army, into which billions of dollars had been poured, disintegrated; the so-called elites either disappeared or found their way into the new state of affairs, though in neither case could it be asserted, as it had been, that they determined Iranian political behavior. One of the experts given credit for predicting what the "crisis of '78" might lead to, James Bill of the University of Texas, nevertheless recommended to American policy-makers as late as December 1978 that the United States government should encourage "the shah . . . to open the system up."²⁴ In other words, even a supposedly dissenting expert voice was still committed to maintaining a regime against which, at the very moment he spoke, literally millions of its people had risen in one of the most massive insurrections in modern history.

Yet Bill made important points about general United

States ignorance on Iran. He was right to say that media coverage was superficial, that official information had been geared to what the Pahlevis wanted, and that the United States made no effort either to get to know the country in depth or to make contact with the opposition. Although Bill did not go on to say it, these failures were and are symptomatic of the general United States and European attitude toward the Islamic world and, as we shall see, toward most of the Third World; indeed, the fact that Bill did not connect what he was justly saying about Iran to the rest of the Islamic world was part of the attitude too. There has been no responsible grappling first of all with the central methodological question, namely, What is the value (if any) of speaking about "Islam" and the Islamic resurgence? What, secondly, is or ought to be the relationship between government policy and scholarly research? Is the expert supposed to be above politics or a political adjunct to governments? Bill and William Beeman of Brown University argued on separate occasions that a major cause of the United States-Iran crisis in 1979 was the failure to consult those academic experts who had been given expensive education precisely to learn to know the Islamic world.²⁵ Yet what went unexamined by Bill and Beeman was the possibility that it was *because* scholars sought out such a role, at the same time calling themselves scholars, that they seemed ambiguous and hence not credible figures to the government as well as to the intellectual community.²⁶

Besides, is there any way for an independent intellectual (which is, after all, what an academic scholar is meant to be) to maintain his or her independence and also to work directly for the state? What is the connection between frank political partisanship and good insight? Does one preclude the other, or is that true only in some cases? Why was it that the whole (but admittedly small) cadre of Islamic scholars in the country could not get a larger hearing? Why was this the case at a time when the United States seemed to be most in need of instruction? All of these questions, of course, can be answered only

within the actual and largely political framework governing relationships historically between the West and the Islamic world. Let us look at this framework and see what role there is in it for the expert.

I have not been able to discover any period in European or American history since the Middle Ages in which Islam was generally discussed or thought about *outside* a framework created by passion, prejudice, and political interests. This may not seem a surprising discovery, but included in it is the entire gamut of scholarly and scientific disciplines which, since the early nineteenth century, have either called themselves collectively the discipline of Orientalism or have tried systematically to deal with the Orient. No one would disagree with the statement that early commentators on Islam like Peter the Venerable and Barthélemy d'Herbelot were passionate Christian polemicists in what they said. But it has been an unexamined assumption that since Europe and the West advanced into the modern scientific age and freed themselves of superstition and ignorance, the march must have included Orientalism. Wasn't it true that Silvestre de Sacy, Edward Lane, Ernest Renan, Hamilton Gibb, and Louis Massignon were learned, objective scholars, and isn't it true that following upon all sorts of advances in twentieth-century sociology, anthropology, linguistics, and history, American scholars who teach the Middle East and Islam in places like Princeton, Harvard, and Chicago are therefore unbiased and free of special pleading in what they do? The answer is no. Not that Orientalism is more biased than other social and humanistic sciences; it is simply as ideological and as contaminated by the world as other disciplines. The main difference is that Orientalist scholars have tended to use their standing as experts to deny—and sometimes even to cover—their deep-seated feelings about Islam with a language of authority whose purpose is to certify their "objectivity" and "scientific impartiality."

That is one point. The other distinguishes a historical pattern in what would otherwise be an undifferentiated char-

acterization of Orientalism. Whenever in modern times an acutely political tension has been felt between the Occident and *its* Orient (or between the West and *its* Islam), there has been a tendency in the West to resort not to direct violence but first to the cool, relatively detached instruments of scientific, quasi-objective representation. In this way "Islam" is made more clear, the "true nature" of its threat appears, an implicit course of action against it is proposed. In such a context both science and direct violence come to be viewed by many Muslims, living in widely varied circumstances, as forms of aggression against Islam.

Two strikingly similar examples illustrate my thesis. We can now see retrospectively that during the nineteenth century both France and England preceded their occupations of portions of the Islamic East with a period in which the various scholarly means of characterizing and understanding the Orient underwent remarkable technical modernization and development.²⁷ The French occupation of Algeria in 1830 followed a period of about two decades during which French scholars literally transformed the study of the Orient from an antiquarian into a rational discipline. Of course, there had been Napoleon Bonaparte's occupation of Egypt in 1798, and of course one should remark the fact that he had prepared for his expedition by marshaling a sophisticated group of scientists to make his enterprise more efficient. My point, however, is that Napoleon's short-lived occupation of Egypt closed a chapter. A new one began with the long period during which, under Silvestre de Sacy's stewardship at French institutions of Oriental study, France became the world leader in Orientalism; this chapter climaxed a little later when French armies occupied Algiers in 1830.

I do not at all want to suggest a causal relationship between one thing and the other, nor to adopt the anti-intellectual view that all scientific learning necessarily leads to violence and suffering. All I want to say is that empires are not born instantaneously, nor during the modern period have

they been run by improvisation. If the development of learning involves the redefinition and reconstitution of fields of human experience by scientists who stand above the material they study, it is not impertinent to see the same development occurring among politicians whose realm of authority is redefined to include "inferior" regions of the world where new "national" interests can be discovered—and later seen to be in need of close supervision.²⁸ I very much doubt that England would have occupied Egypt in so long and massively institutionalized a way had it not been for the durable investment in Oriental learning first cultivated by scholars like Edward William Lane and William Jones. Familiarity, accessibility, representability: these were what Orientalists demonstrated about the Orient. The Orient could be seen, it could be studied, it could be managed. It need not remain a distant, marvelous, incomprehensible, and yet very rich place. It could be brought home—or more simply, Europe could make itself at home there, as it subsequently did.

My second example is a contemporary one. The Islamic Orient today is clearly important for its resources or for its geopolitical location. Neither of these, however, is interchangeable with the interests, needs, or aspirations of the native Orientals. Ever since the end of World War II, the United States has been taking positions of dominance and hegemony once held in the Islamic world by Britain and France. With this replacement of one imperial system by another have gone two things: first, the moderate burgeoning of crisis-oriented academic and expert interest in Islam, and second, an extraordinary revolution in the techniques available to the largely private-sector press and electronic journalism industries. Never before has an international trouble spot like Iran been covered so instantaneously and so regularly as it has by the media: Iran has therefore seemed to be *in* American lives, and yet deeply alien from them, with an unprecedented intensity. Together these two phenomena—the second much more than the first—by which a sizable apparatus of university,

government, and business experts study Islam and the Middle East and by which Islam has become a subject familiar to every consumer of news in the West, have almost entirely domesticated the Islamic world, or at least those aspects of it that are considered newsworthy. Not only has that world become the subject of the most profound cultural and economic Western saturation in history—for no non-Western realm has been so dominated by the United States as the Arabic-Islamic world is today—but the interchange between Islam and the West, in this case the United States, is profoundly one-sided and, so far as other, less newsworthy parts of the Islamic world are concerned, profoundly skewed.

It is only a slight overstatement to say that Muslims and Arabs are essentially covered, discussed, apprehended, either as oil suppliers or as potential terrorists. Very little of the detail, the human density, the passion of Arab-Muslim life has entered the awareness of even those people whose profession it is to report the Islamic world. What we have instead is a limited series of crude, essentialized caricatures of the Islamic world presented in such a way as, among other things, to make that world vulnerable to military aggression.²⁹ I do not think it is an accident that recent talk of United States military intervention in the Arabian Gulf, or the Carter Doctrine, or discussions of Rapid Deployment Forces, has been preceded by a period of "Islam's" rational presentation through the cool medium of television and through "objective" Orientalist study (which, paradoxically, either in its "irrelevance" to modern actualities or in its propagandistic "objective" variety, has a uniformly alienating effect): in many ways our actual situation today bears a chilling resemblance to the nineteenth-century British and French examples cited previously.

There are other political and cultural reasons for this. After World War II, when the United States took over the imperial role played by France and Britain, a set of policies was devised for dealing with the world that suited the peculiarities and the problems of each region that affected (and was

affected by) United States interests. Europe was designated for postwar recovery, for which the Marshall Plan, among other similar American policies, was suited. The Soviet Union of course emerged as the United States' most formidable competitor, and, as no one needs to be told, the cold war produced policies, studies, even a mentality, which still dominate relationships between one superpower and the other. That left what has come to be called the Third World, an arena of competition not only between the United States and the Soviet Union but also between the United States and various native powers only recently in possession of their independence from European colonizers.

Almost without exception, the Third World seemed to American policy-makers to be "underdeveloped," in the grip of unnecessarily archaic and static "traditional" modes of life, dangerously prone to communist subversion and internal stagnation. For the Third World "modernization" became the order of the day, so far as the United States was concerned. And, as has been suggested by James Peck, "modernization theory was the ideological answer to a world of increasing revolutionary upheaval and continued reaction among traditional political elites."³⁰ Huge sums were poured into Africa and Asia with the aim of stopping communism, promoting United States trade, and above all, developing a cadre of native allies whose express *raison d'être* seemed to be the transformation of backward countries into mini-Americas. In time the initial investments required additional sums and increased military support to keep them going. And this in turn produced the interventions all over Asia and Latin America which regularly pitted the United States against almost every brand of native nationalism.

The history of United States efforts on behalf of modernization and development in the Third World can never be completely understood unless it is also noted how the policy itself produced a style of thought and a habit of seeing the Third World which increased the political, emotional, and

strategic investment in the very idea of modernization. Vietnam is a perfect instance of this. Once it was decided that the country was to be saved from communism and indeed from itself, a whole science of modernization for Vietnam (whose latest and most costly phase came to be known as "Vietnamization") came into being. Not only government specialists but university experts were involved. In time, the survival of pro-American and anticommunist regimes in Saigon dominated everything, even when it became clear that a huge majority of the population viewed those regimes as alien and oppressive, and even when the cost of fighting unsuccessful wars on behalf of those regimes had devastated the whole region and cost Lyndon Johnson the presidency. Still, a very great amount of writing on the virtues of modernizing traditional society had acquired an almost unquestioned social, and certainly cultural, authority in the United States, at the same time that in many parts of the Third World "modernization" was connected in the popular mind with foolish spending, unnecessary gadgetry and armaments, corrupt rulers, and brutal United States intervention in the affairs of small, weak countries.

Among the many illusions that persisted in modernization theory was one that seemed to have a special pertinence to the Islamic world: namely, that before the advent of the United States, Islam existed in a kind of timeless childhood, shielded from true development by an archaic set of superstitions, prevented by its strange priests and scribes from moving out of the Middle Ages into the modern world. At this point, Orientalism and modernization theory dovetail nicely. If, as Orientalist scholarship had traditionally taught, Muslims were no more than fatalistic children tyrannized by their mind-set, their *ulama*, and their wild-eyed political leaders into resisting the West and progress, could not every political scientist, anthropologist, and sociologist worthy of trust show that, given a reasonable chance, something resembling the American way of life might be introduced into Islam via consumer goods, anticommunist propaganda, and "good" leaders? The main

difficulty with Islam, however, was that unlike India and China, it had never really been pacified or defeated. For reasons which seemed always to defy the understanding of scholars, Islam (or some version of it) continued its sway over its adherents, who, it came regularly to be argued, were unwilling to accept reality, or at least that part of reality in which the West's superiority was demonstrable.

Efforts at modernization persisted all through the two decades that followed World War II. Iran became in effect the modernization success story and its ruler the "modernized" leader *par excellence*. As for the rest of the Islamic world, whether it was Arab nationalists, Egypt's Gamal Abdel Nasser, Indonesia's Sukarno, the Palestinian nationalists, Iranian opposition groups, or thousands of unknown Islamic teachers, brotherhoods, and orders, it was all either opposed or not covered by Western scholars with a heavy investment in modernization theory and American strategic and economic interests in the Islamic world.

During the explosive decade of the seventies, Islam gave further proof of its fundamental intransigence. There was, for example, the Iranian revolution: neither procommunist nor promodernization, the people who overthrew the shah were simply not explainable according to the canons of behavior presupposed by modernization theory. They did not seem grateful for the quotidian benefits of modernization (cars, an enormous military and security apparatus, a stable regime) and appeared indifferent to the blandishments of "Western" ideas altogether.³¹ What was especially troubling about their attitude—Khomeini's in particular—was their fierce unwillingness to accept any style of politics (or for that matter, of rationality) that was not deliberately their own. Above all, it was their attachment to Islam that seemed especially defiant. Ironically, only a few commentators on "Islamic" atavism and medieval modes of logic in the West noted that a few miles to the west of Iran, in Begin's Israel, there was a regime fully willing to mandate its actions by religious authority and by a

very backward-looking theological doctrine.³² An even smaller number of commentators decrying the apparent upsurge in Islamic religiosity connected it to the upsurge in the United States of television religions numbering many millions of adherents, or to the fact that two of the three major presidential candidates in 1980 were enthusiastic born-again Christians.


Religious intensity was thus ascribed solely to Islam even when religious feeling was spreading remarkably everywhere: one need only remember the effusive treatment by the liberal press of patently illiberal religious figures like Solzhenitsyn or Pope John Paul II to see how one-sidedly hostile the attitude to Islam was.³³ A retreat into religion became the way most Islamic states could be explained, from Saudi Arabia—which, with what was supposed to be a peculiarly Islamic logic, refused to ratify the Camp David Accords—to Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Algeria. In this way, we can see how the Islamic world was differentiated, in the Western mind generally, in the United States' in particular, from regions of the world to which a cold-war analysis could be applied. There seemed to be no way, for example, in which one could speak of Saudi Arabia and Kuwait as parts of "the free world"; even Iran during the shah's regime, despite its overwhelming anti-Soviet commitment, never really belonged to "our" side the way France and Britain do. Nevertheless policy-makers in the United States persisted in speaking of the "loss" of Iran as, during the past three decades, they spoke of the "loss" of China, Vietnam, and Angola. Moreover it has been the singularly unhappy lot of the Persian Gulf's Islamic states to be considered by American crisis managers as places ready for American military occupation. Thus George Ball in the *New York Times Magazine* of June 28, 1970, warned that "the tragedy of Vietnam" might lead to "pacifism and isolation" at home, whereas United States interests in the Middle East were so great that the president ought to "educate" Americans about the possibility of military intervention there.³⁴

One more thing needs mention here: the role of Israel in mediating Western and particularly American views of the Islamic world since World War II. In the first place, Israel's avowedly religious character is rarely mentioned in the Western press: only recently have there been overt references to Israeli religious fanaticism, and all of these have been to the zealots of Gush Emunim, whose principal activity has been the violent setting up of illegal settlements on the West Bank. Yet most accounts of Gush Emunim in the West simply leave out the inconvenient fact that it was "secular" labor governments that first instituted illegal settlements in occupied Arab territory, not just the religious fanatics now stirring things up. This kind of one-sided reporting is, I think, an indication of how Israel—the Middle East's "only democracy" and "our staunch ally"—has been used as a foil for Islam.³⁵ Thus Israel has appeared as a bastion of Western civilization hewn (with much approbation and self-congratulation) out of the Islamic wilderness. Secondly, Israel's security in American eyes has become conveniently interchangeable with fending off Islam, perpetuating Western hegemony, and demonstrating the virtues of modernization. In these ways, three sets of illusions economically buttress and reproduce one another in the interests of shoring up the Western self-image and promoting Western power over the Orient: the view of Islam, the ideology of modernization, and the affirmations of Israel's general value to the West.

In addition, and to make "our" attitudes to Islam very clear, a whole information and policy-making apparatus in the United States depends on these illusions and diffuses them widely. Large segments of the intelligentsia allied to the community of geopolitical strategists together deliver themselves of expansive ideas about Islam, oil, the future of Western civilization, and the fight for democracy against turmoil and terrorism. For reasons that I have already discussed, the Islamic specialists feed into this great stream, despite the undeniable fact that only a relative fraction of what goes on in academic

Islamic studies is directly infected with the cultural and political visions to be found in geopolitics and cold-war ideology. A little lower down come the mass media, which take from the other two units of the apparatus what is most easily compressed into images: hence the caricatures, the frightening mobs, the concentration on "Islamic" punishment, and so on. All of this is presided over by the great power establishments—the oil companies, the mammoth corporations and multinationals, the defense and intelligence communities, the executive branch of the government. When President Carter spent his first New Year in office with the shah in 1978, and said that Iran was "an island of stability," he was speaking with the mobilized force of this formidable apparatus, representing United States interests and covering Islam at the same time.

II. *Communities of Interpretation*

 How geopolitical strategists and the liberal intellectuals have made use of Islam in the United States is worth some attention here. It is not too much of an exaggeration to say that before the sudden OPEC price rises in early 1974, "Islam" as such scarcely figured either in the culture or in the media. One saw and heard of Arabs and Iranians, of Pakistanis and Turks, rarely of Muslims. But the dramatically higher cost of imported oil soon became associated in the public mind with a cluster of unpleasant things: American dependence on imported oil (which was usually referred to as "being at the mercy of foreign oil producers"); the apprehension that intransigence was being communicated from the Persian Gulf region to individual Americans; above all a signal—as if from a new, hitherto unidentified force—saying that energy was no longer "ours" for the taking. Words like "monopoly," "cartel," and "block" thereafter achieved a remarkably sudden if selective currency, although very rarely did anyone speak of the small group of American multinationals as a cartel, a designation reserved for the OPEC members. Mainly, though, it now seemed that with the new

pressure on the economy, an equally new cultural and political situation was at hand. From being the world's dominant power, the United States was dramatically embattled. This was now the end of the postwar period, Fritz Stern said in *Commentary*.³⁶

The most significant early statement of the change came in a series of articles published in *Commentary* during the early part of 1975. First there was Robert W. Tucker's "Oil: The Issue of American Intervention" (January), then there was Daniel Patrick Moynihan's "The United States in Opposition" (March), both in their titles making their arguments absolutely unmistakable. Moynihan went on to represent the United States at the United Nations, and there he made many speeches putting the world on notice that the "Western democracies" could not idly stand by and let themselves be bullied by a mere automatic majority of former colonies. But the terms were set in what he and Tucker had put forth previously in their *Commentary* essays.

Neither man had anything to say about Islam: however, "Islam," as it appeared a year later, was to play a role already prepared for it by the sudden and unacceptable changes described by Tucker and Moynihan. And they in turn gave shape, rhetoric, and dramatic structure to what many in the country were actually experiencing. For the first time in United States history it seemed that, as Tucker put it, egalitarianism was being applied from abroad to the United States itself. Here were foreign nations, according to Moynihan, essentially the creatures of British imperialism, whose ideas and identities were borrowed from British socialism. Their philosophies were based on the expropriation or, failing that, the distribution of wealth; they were interested in mere equality, not in production nor, it seemed, in liberty. "We are of the liberty party," he said, and then went on to add with a military flourish, "it might surprise us what energies might be released were we to unfurl those banners."³⁷ These new nations, among them the oil producers, were interested in evening out the

disparities between "us" and "them," something Tucker thought would introduce an ominous "interdependence," which we had better be prepared to resist—by invading them, if necessary.³⁸

A number of strategies in these two articles are particularly worth mentioning. Neither Tucker's oil producers nor Moynihan's new Third World countries have identities, histories, or national trajectories of their own. They are simply mentioned, briefly characterized as a collective unit, then dropped. Former colonies are former colonies; oil producers are oil producers. Otherwise they appear to be both anonymous and strangely, even threateningly, obdurate. Their very *thereness* is something of an implied risk to "us." Secondly, these countries are abstractions against which the formerly established world powers are now arrayed. "Suddenly," Tucker says in a later essay on oil and force, "we are confronted with the prospect of an international society in which it may no longer be possible to insure an orderly distribution of what has been termed 'the world product' and this because the principal holders of power among the developed and capitalist states may no longer be the principal creators and generators of order."³⁹ If these new nations are not creators and generators of order, they can only be disruptors of it. And thirdly, they disrupt because all they are and can be as a group is inversely equal and opposite to "us."

What Tucker and Moynihan were saying followed in part the logic of a canonical hymn to the beleaguered Western ethos, which appears and reappears periodically in the modern history of the West. We see it, for example, in Henri Massis's *La Défense de l'Occident* (1927), and more recently in Anthony Hartley's article "The Barbarian Connection: On the 'Destructive Element' in Civilized History."⁴⁰ For Tucker and Moynihan, however, what opposes the West is not something "we" know, in the way that a European imperialist might speak of Orientals as "people we know" because in fact "we" have actually ruled them. At best, according to Moynihan, the

new states of the Third World are imitations, known only through what they are imitating, not by virtue of what they are. There seems to be no point of reference on the new "international society" that Tucker refers to, except that it violates the old order. Who are the people, what are their actual desires, where did they come from, why do they behave as they do? These are unasked and consequently unanswerable questions.

At almost the very same time, the United States was retreating from Indochina. Much has recently been written about the "post-Vietnam syndrome" in American politics, although few people have also noted how the claim that very distant American interests need military defense against instability and insurrection seems to have been transferred whole from out of Vietnam and into a nearer place, the Muslim world. This has been accompanied by a progressive liberal disenchantment with Third World causes in general, particularly those whose promise seems to have been betrayed. One thinks, for example, of Gerard Chaliand's *Revolution in the Third World*, an anguished *cri de coeur* by a well-known supporter of the Vietnamese, Cuban, Angolan, Algerian, and Palestine liberation movements; writing in 1977, he concluded that most anticolonial efforts had resulted in mediocre, repressive states, hardly worth Western enthusiasm.⁴¹ Or there is the case of *Dissent* magazine, which sponsored a symposium in its fall 1978 issue based on the question "Do the recent events in Cambodia [the Khmer Rouge victory there and subsequent reported horrors] warrant a reconsideration of our opposition to the Vietnam war?" The question, if not the answers, indicates the mood of withdrawal from 1960s enthusiasm and its replacement by a troubling discomfort with new international realities, all of them suggesting impending catastrophe. The general failure of the international economic system was justifiably adduced by the argument.

What the consumer of news and of oil sensed, in short, was an unprecedented potential for loss and disruption with

no face or visible identity to it. All we knew was that what we took for granted was about to be taken from us. We could no longer drive our cars the way we used to; oil was much more expensive; our comforts and habits seemed to be undergoing a radical and most unwelcome change. Even the oil—that is, the actual material in question—remained vague in comparison with the threat of losing it: no one seemed to know whether there was a real shortage, or whether the long gas lines were induced by panic, or whether the oil companies' inexorably rising margins of profit had anything to do with the crisis.⁴² Other things seemed more relevant. Robed Arabs, fantastically monied and well armed, obtrusively appeared everywhere in the West. The new Islamic assertiveness then could easily be traced back to what some called the Ramadan War in October 1973. On that occasion the Egyptian army crossed the formidable Bar-Lev line, but Arab soldiers did not run away as in 1967; they fought surprisingly well. Then the Palestine Liberation Organization appeared at the United Nations in 1974. Sheikh Yamani became a figure of authority for no ascertainable reason, except that he was Muslim and came from oil-rich Saudi Arabia. The shah of Iran also became a world leader. Indonesia, the Philippines, Nigeria, Pakistan, Turkey, various Gulf states, Algeria, Morocco: the suddenness of their capacity to trouble the United States in the mid-1970s was a disturbing concomitant of how little of their past and of their identity was known. A large number of Islamic states, personalities, and presences thereby passed imperceptibly in the general consciousness from the status of barely acknowledged existence to the status of "news."

There was no real transition from one to the other. Neither was there any significant segment of the population ready to explain or identify what appeared to be a new phenomenon, except for those who, like Moynihan and Tucker, were drawing world-historical conclusions in a framework that simply accommodated but made no specific allowances for Islam. As a result the image of Islam today, in every place that one

encounters it, is an *unrestrained* and *immediate* one. There is an unstated assumption, first of all, that the proper name "Islam" denotes a simple thing to which one can refer immediately, as one refers to "democracy," or to a person, or to an institution like the Catholic Church. This immediacy is at work, for example, in the *Time* cover story referred to above. More disturbingly, however, it is regularly apparent in higher forms of general cultural argument, most often as a subject reflected on with gravity and seriousness in important liberal journals. In this respect, because of the changes in intellectual-geopolitical thinking that I have described, there is little difference between them and the mass media.

A noteworthy instance is an essay by Michael Walzer in the December 8, 1979 issue of the *New Republic*. Walzer's title is "The Islam Explosion," and he deals as a self-confessed layman with the vast number of important if (according to him) largely violent and unpleasant twentieth-century events—in the Philippines, in Iran, in Palestine, and elsewhere—which, he argues, can be interpreted as instances of the same thing: Islam. What all these events have in common, says Walzer, is first of all that they show a persistent pattern of political power encroaching on the West; second, that they are all generated from a frightening moral fervor (for instance, when Palestinians resist Israeli colonialism it is Walzer's firm assertion that such resistance is *religious*, not political or civil or human); and third, that these events shatter "the thin colonialist façade of liberalism, secularism, socialism, or democracy." In all three of these common characteristics it is "Islam" that can be discerned, and this "Islam" is a force overriding the distances in time and space that otherwise separate all these events. One could also notice how—again according to Walzer—if you speak of Islam you more or less automatically eliminate space and time, you eliminate political complications like democracy, socialism, and secularism, and you eliminate moral restraint. By the end of his essay Walzer has convinced himself (at least) that when *he* says the word

"Islam" he is talking about a real object called Islam, an object so immediate as to make any mediation or qualifications applied to it seem mere supererogatory fussiness. With this immediacy, as its inevitable adjunct, goes the tendency to treat Islam as something without a history of its own; or if a history is conceded to it, that history will seem irrelevant. Thus it is that the arguments of conservatives like Moynihan and Tucker are confirmed and fleshed out by left-liberals.

Another aspect of the public image of Islam in the new geopolitical-intellectual setting is that it is invariably found in a confrontational relationship with whatever is normal, Western, everyday, "ours." This is certainly the impression one gets from reading Walzer, or from reading the scholars on whom Walzer relies. The very concept of a world of Islam—which was the subject of a four-part series by Flora Lewis in the *New York Times* on December 28, 29, 30, and 31, 1979 (about which I shall have something to say in Chapter Two)—implies its antagonism towards "our" world. Indeed, the very reason for the series was that Islam (that is, those Iranians holding American hostages) was "against" us. This feeling was intensified when Islam's apparent aberrations from normalcy were catalogued by Lewis: the peculiarities of the Arabic language, the oddities of its beliefs, the illiberal totalitarianism of its domination over its faithful, and so forth. If Islam's immediacy makes it seem directly available, then its divergence from our familiar reality and norms sets it against us directly, threateningly, drastically. The net result is that Islam has acquired the polymorphous status of a tangible, recognizable reality about which many statements and logical strategies—most of them anthropomorphic—become possible without restraint.

Thus you can readily equate Islam with almost any Muslim: Ayatollah Khomeini is the readiest candidate for this. Then you can go on to compare Islam to everything you dislike, regardless of whether what you say is factually accurate. As an example there is the Manor Books paperback publica-

tion of Khomeini's *Islamic Government* under the title *Ayatollah Khomeini's Mein Kampf*. Accompanying this text is an analysis of it by one George Carpozi, Jr. (a senior *New York Post* reporter), who for reasons of his own claims that Khomeini is an Arab and that Islam began in the fifth century A.C. Carpozi's analysis begins euphoniously as follows:

Like Adolph Hitler in another time, Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini is a tyrant, a hater, a baiter, a threat to world order and peace. The principal difference between the author of *Mein Kampf* and the compiler of the vapid *Islamic Government* is that one was an atheist while the other pretends to be a man of God.⁴³

Such representations of Islam have regularly testified to a penchant for dividing the world into pro- and anti-American (or pro- and anticommunist), an unwillingness to report political processes, an imposition of patterns and values that are ethnocentric or irrelevant or both, pure misinformation, repetition, an avoidance of detail, an absence of genuine perspective. All of this can be traced, not to Islam, but to aspects of society in the West and to the media which this idea of "Islam" reflects and serves. The result is that we have redivided the world into Orient and Occident—the old Orientalist thesis pretty much unchanged—the better to blind ourselves not only to the world but to ourselves and to what our relationship to the so-called Third World has really been.

A number of rather important consequences have followed. One is that a specific picture—for it is that—of Islam has been supplied. Another is that its meaning or message has on the whole continued to be circumscribed and stereotyped. A third is that a confrontational political situation has been created, pitting "us" against "Islam." A fourth is that this reductive image of Islam has had ascertainable results in the world of Islam itself. A fifth is that both the media's Islam and the cultural attitude to it can tell us a great deal not only about "Islam" but about institutions in the culture, the politics of information and knowledge, and national policy.

Yet in listing all these things about the general image of Islam now current, I do not mean to suggest that a "real" Islam exists somewhere out there that the media, acting out of base motives, have perverted. Not at all. For Muslims as for non-Muslims, Islam is an objective and also a subjective fact, because people create that fact in their faith, in their societies, histories, and traditions, or, in the case of non-Muslim outsiders, because they must in a sense fix, personify, stamp the identity of that which they feel confronts them collectively or individually. This is to say that the media's Islam, the Western scholar's Islam, the Western reporter's Islam, and the Muslim's Islam are all acts of will and interpretation that take place in history, and can only be dealt with in history as acts of will and interpretation. I myself am neither religious nor of an Islamic background, although I think I can understand someone who declares himself or herself to be convinced of a particular faith. But insofar as I feel it is possible to discuss faith at all, it is in the form of *interpretations* of faith manifesting themselves in human acts that take place in human history and society. When, for example, we discuss the "Islamic" revolution that brought down the Pahlevi regime, we ought to say nothing about whether or not the revolutionaries were *really* Muslims in their faith; but we can say something about their conception of Islam as it pitted them self-consciously—Islamically, so to speak—against a regime they viewed as anti-Islamic, oppressive, tyrannical. We can then compare their interpretation of Islam with what *Time* and *Le Monde* have said about Islam and the Iranian revolution.

In other words, what we are dealing with here are in the very widest sense communities of interpretation, many of them at odds with one another, prepared in many instances literally to go to war with one another, all of them creating and revealing themselves and their interpretations as very central features of their existence. No one lives in direct contact either with truth or with reality. Each of us lives in a world actually made by human beings, in which such things as "the

nation" or "Christianity" or "Islam" are the result of agreed-upon convention, of historical processes, and above all, of willed human labor expended to give those things an identity we can recognize. Not that truth and reality do not in fact exist. They do, as we know when we see the trees and the houses in our neighborhoods, or break a bone, or feel the anguish of a loved one's death. But on the whole, we tend to disregard or minimize the extent to which we depend for our sense of reality not just on the interpretations and meanings we form individually for ourselves but also on those we receive. For these received interpretations are an integral part of living in society. This has been clearly put by C. Wright Mills:

The first rule for understanding the human condition is that men live in second-hand worlds. They are aware of much more than they have personally experienced; and their own experience is always indirect. The quality of their lives is determined by meanings they have received from others. Everyone lives in a world of such meanings. No man stands alone directly confronting a world of solid fact. No such world is available. The closest men come to it is when they are infants or when they become insane: then, in a terrifying scene of meaningless events and senseless confusion, they are often seized with the panic of near-total insecurity. But in their everyday life they do not experience a world of solid fact; their experience itself is selected by stereotyped meanings and shaped by ready-made interpretations. Their images of the world, and of themselves, are given to them by crowds of witnesses they have never met and never shall meet. Yet for every man these images—provided by strangers and dead men—are the very basis of his life as a human being.

The consciousness of men does not determine their material existence; nor does their material existence determine their consciousness. Between consciousness and existence stand meanings and designs and communications which other men have passed on—first, in human speech itself, and later, by the management of symbols. These received and manipulated interpretations de-

cisively influence such consciousness as men have of their existence. They provide the clues to what men see, to how they respond to it, to how they feel about it, and to how they respond to these feelings. Symbols focus experience; meanings organize knowledge, guiding the surface perceptions of an instant no less than the aspirations of a lifetime.

Every man, to be sure, *observes* nature, social events, and his own self: but he does not, he has never, observed most of what he takes to be fact, about nature, society, or self. Every man interprets what he observes—as well as much that he has not observed: but his terms of interpretation are not his own; he has not personally formulated or even tested them. Every man talks about observations and interpretations to others: but the terms of his *reports* are much more likely than not the phrases and images of other people which he has taken over as his own. For most of what he calls solid fact, sound interpretation, suitable presentations, every man is increasingly dependent upon the observation posts, the interpretation centers, the presentation depots, which in contemporary society are established by means of what I am going to call the cultural apparatus.⁴⁴

For most Americans (the same is generally true for Europeans) the branch of the cultural apparatus that has been delivering Islam to them for the most part includes the television and radio networks, the daily newspapers, and the mass-circulation news magazines; films play a role, of course, if only because to the extent that a visual sense of history and distant lands informs our own, it often comes by way of the cinema. Together, this powerful concentration of mass media can be said to constitute a communal core of interpretations providing a certain picture of Islam and, of course, reflecting powerful interests in the society served by the media. Along with this picture, which is not merely a picture but also a communicable set of feelings about the picture, goes what we may call its over-all context. By context I mean the picture's setting, its place in reality, the values implicit in it, and not

least, the kind of attitude it promotes in the beholder. Thus, if the Iranian crisis is regularly rendered by television pictures of chanting "Islamic" mobs accompanied by commentary about "anti-Americanism," the distance, unfamiliarity, and threatening quality of the spectacle limit "Islam" to those characteristics; this in turn gives rise to a feeling that something basically unattractive and negative confronts us. Since Islam is "against" us and "out there," the necessity of adopting a confrontational response of our own towards it will not be doubted. And if we see and hear a Walter Cronkite framing his nightly broadcast with the phrase "that's the way it is," we too will go on to conclude, not that the scene before us is what a television company has caused to appear before us in this way, but that it is indeed the way things are: natural, unchanging, "foreign," opposed to "us." No wonder that Jean Daniel of *Le Nouvel Observateur* was able to say on November 26, 1979, "les États-Unis [sont] assiégés par l'Islam."

Although one depends on them a great deal, television, newspapers, radio, and magazines are not our only source on "Islam." There are books, specialized journals, and lecturers available whose views are more complex than the essentially fragmented and immediate things delivered by the mass media.⁴⁵ Also, it is important to say that even in newspapers and on radio and television, there are a host of variations to be observed, as between one editorial line and another, or between different "op-ed" viewpoints, or between alternative or countercultural images and conventional ones. We do not, in short, live at the mercy of a centralized propaganda apparatus, even though a great deal of what is really propaganda is chummed out by the media and even by reputable scholars. Yet despite the variety and the differences, and however much we proclaim the contrary, what the media produce is neither spontaneous nor completely "free": "news" does not just happen, pictures and ideas do not merely spring from reality into our eyes and minds, truth is not directly available, we do not have unrestrained variety at our disposal. For like all modes of

communication, television, radio, and newspapers observe certain rules and conventions to get things across intelligibly, and it is these, often more than the reality being conveyed, that shape the material delivered by the media. Since these tacitly agreed-upon rules serve efficiently to reduce an unmanageable reality into "news" or "stories," and since the media strive to reach the same audience which they believe is ruled by a uniform set of assumptions about reality, the picture of Islam (and of anything else, for that matter) is likely to be quite uniform, in some ways reductive, and monochromatic. It ought to go without saying that the media are profit-seeking corporations and therefore, quite understandably, have an interest in promoting some images of reality rather than others. They do so within a *political* context made active and effective by an unconscious ideology, which the media disseminate without serious reservations or opposition.

A number of qualifications are now in order. It cannot be said that the Western industrial states are repressive, propaganda-ruled polities; they are not, of course. In the United States, for example, virtually any opinion can be expressed, and there exists an unparalleled receptivity on the part of citizens and the media to new, unconventional, or unpopular points of view. Moreover, the sheer variety of newspapers, magazines, and television and radio programs available, to say nothing of books and pamphlets, almost defies description or characterization. How then can one say, with any sort of fairness and accuracy, that it all expresses *one* general view?

Certainly one cannot say it, nor do I want even to try. But I do think that despite this extraordinary variety there is a qualitative and a quantitative tendency to favor certain views and certain representations of reality over others. Let me quickly recapitulate some things I have already said, and then go on to show how they synchronize with certain aspects of the media. We do not live in a natural world: things like newspapers, news, and opinions do not occur naturally; they are *made*, as the result of human will, history, social circum-

stances, institutions, and the conventions of one's profession. Such aims of the press as objectivity, factuality, realistic coverage, and accuracy are highly relative terms; they express intentions, perhaps, and not realizable goals. They are definitely not to be thought of as occurring as a matter of course, just because we have grown accustomed to thinking of our newspapers as reliable and factual, while those in communist and non-Western countries are considered propagandistic and ideological. The actuality is, as Herbert Gans has shown in his important book *Deciding What's News*, that journalists, news agencies, and networks consciously go about deciding what is to be portrayed, how it is to be portrayed, and the like.⁴⁶ News, in other words, is less an inert given than the result of a complex process of usually deliberate selection and expression.

We have recently been given ample evidence of the way the major news-gathering and news-disseminating apparatus works in the West. Books by Gay Talese and Harrison Salisbury on the *New York Times*, David Halberstam's *The Powers That Be*, Gaye Tuchman's *Making News*, Herbert Schiller's various studies of the communications industry, Michael Schudson's *Discovering the News*, Armand Mattelart's *Multinational Corporations and the Control of Culture*:⁴⁷ these are but a few of the studies done from differing standpoints that affirm the extent to which the formation of news and opinion in the society at large operates according to rules, within frameworks, by means of conventions that give the whole process an unmistakable over-all identity. Like every human being, the reporter assumes that certain things are normal; values are internalized and need not always be tested, just as the habits of one's society are taken for granted; one's education, one's nationality and religion, are not forgotten as foreign societies and cultures are described; the consciousness of a professional code of ethics and a way of doing things are involved in what one says, how one says it, and who one feels it is said for. Robert Darnton has described these matters very engagingly in his essay "Writing News and Telling Stories," so

much so that he makes us acutely sensitive not only to the reporter's working reality but to such things as "the symbiosis as well as antagonisms that grow up between a reporter and his sources," the pressures of "standardizing and stereotyping," and the way in which reporters "bring more to the events they cover than they take away from them."⁴⁸

The American media differ from the French and British media because the societies differ so much, the audiences differ, the organizations and the interests differ. Every American reporter has to be aware that his or her country is a superpower with interests and ways of pursuing those interests that other countries do not have. Independence of the press is an admirable thing, whether in practice or in theory; but nearly every American journalist reports the world with a subliminal consciousness that his or her corporation is a participant in American power which, when it is threatened by foreign countries, makes press independence subordinate to what are often only implicit expressions of loyalty and patriotism, of simple national identification. But surely this is not surprising. What is surprising is that the independent press is not normally thought of as taking part in foreign policy, although in many ways it so effectively does. Leaving aside CIA use of journalists working abroad, the American media inevitably collect information on the outside world inside a framework dominated by government policy; when there are conflicts with that policy, as was the case with Vietnam, then the media formulate their independent views, but even then the point is to have those bear upon, if not actually change, government policy, which is what counts for all Americans, members of the press included.

Abroad, the American journalist is understandably thrust back on what he or she knows best. This is always the case when one is transplanted to a foreign culture, and is especially true when the journalist feels he is abroad to translate what happens there into language that compatriots at home (policy-makers included) can understand. He seeks out

the company of other journalists abroad, but he also keeps in touch with his embassy, other American residents, and people known to have good relations with Americans. Something not to be underestimated is the journalist's sense while abroad of relying not only on what he knows and learns but also on what as an American media representative abroad he *ought* to know, learn, and say. A *New York Times* correspondent knows exactly what the *Times* is and what in a corporate way it thinks of itself as being: surely there is a crucial, perhaps even a determining, difference between what the *Times's* Teheran correspondent files as a story and what a free-lance journalist who hopes to get an article in *The Nation* or *In These Times* writes while in Teheran. The medium itself exercises great pressure. Doing a spot on the *NBC Nightly News* will cause a Cairo correspondent to put things differently than might *Time* magazine's Cairo bureau chief in an article prepared over a longer period of time. Then too, there is the way a correspondent's foreign report is recast by the editors at home: another set of unconscious political and ideological constraints comes into play here.

American media coverage of foreign countries not only creates itself but also intensifies interests "we" already have there. Media points of view stress certain things for an American, others for an Italian or Russian. All of this converges around a common center, or consensus, which all the media organizations almost certainly feel themselves to be clarifying, crystallizing, forming. This is the point. The media can do all sorts of things, represent all sorts of points of view, provide many things that are eccentric, unexpectedly original, even aberrant. But in the end, because they are corporations serving and promoting a corporate identity—"America" and even "the West"—they all have the same central consensus in mind. This, as we shall see a little later in the case of Iran, shapes the news, decides *what* is news and *how* it is news. It does not, however, dictate or determine the news involuntarily: it is neither the result of deterministic laws, nor of conspiracy, nor

of dictatorship. It is the result of the culture; better, it *is* the culture; and it is, in the case of the United States media, an appreciable component of contemporary history. There would be no point in analyzing and criticizing the phenomenon if it were not true that the media are responsive to what we are and want.⁴⁹

The contents of this consensus are better described as actually occurring than either prescriptively or abstractly. So far as media coverage of Islam and Iran is concerned, I shall let the consensus speak for itself as it emerges in the course of analysis in my next chapter. Here, however, I want to make only two concluding comments on the subject.

First of all, we must remember that because the United States is a complex society made up of many often incompatible subcultures, the need to impart a more or less standardized common culture through the media is felt with particular strength. This is not a feature associated only with the mass media in our era, but one that has a special pedigree going back to the founding of the American republic. Beginning with the Puritan "errand in the wilderness," there has existed in this country an institutionalized ideological rhetoric expressing a peculiarly American consciousness, identity, destiny, and role whose function has always been to incorporate as much of America's (and the world's) diversity as possible, and to re-form it in a uniquely American way. This rhetoric and its institutional presence in American life have been convincingly analyzed by numerous scholars, among them Perry Miller and, most recently, Sacvan Bercovitch.⁵⁰ One result of this is the illusion, if not always the actuality, of consensus, and it is as part of this essentially nationalist consensus that the media, acting on behalf of the society they serve, believe themselves to be functioning.

The second point concerns how this consensus actually works. The simplest and, I think, the most accurate way of characterizing it is to say that it sets limits and maintains pressures.⁵¹ It does not dictate content, and it does not mechani-

cally reflect a certain class or economic group's interests. We must think of it as drawing invisible lines beyond which a reporter or commentator does not feel it necessary to go. Thus the notion that American military power might be used for malevolent purposes is relatively impossible within the consensus, just as the idea that America is a force for good in the world is routine and normal. Similarly, Americans tend to identify with foreign societies or cultures projecting a pioneering, new spirit (e.g. Israel) of wresting the land from ill use or savages,⁵² whereas they often mistrust and do not have much interest in traditional cultures, even those in the throes of revolutionary renewal. Americans assume that communist propaganda is guided by similar cultural and political constraints, but in America's case, the media's setting of limits and maintaining of pressures is done with little apparent admission or awareness that this is what in fact is being done.⁵³ And this too is an aspect of set limits. Let me give another simple example. When the American hostages were seized and held in Teheran, the consensus immediately came into play, decreeing more or less that only what took place concerning the hostages was important about Iran; the rest of the country, its political processes, its daily life, its personalities, its geography and history, were eminently ignorable: Iran and the Iranian people were defined in terms of whether they were for or against the United States.

So much for some general points about what might be considered the qualitative emphases in reporting and distributing. What needs to be said about quantitative aspects of the news as interpretation can be said straightforwardly. The widest distribution and therefore the strongest impact is made by a handful of organizations: two or three wire services, three television networks, half a dozen daily newspapers, two (or perhaps three) weekly news magazines.⁵⁴ It is only necessary to mention a few names for the point to be made: CBS, *Time*, the *New York Times*, UPI. Among them they reach more people, make a deeper impression, get more of a certain kind

of news across than do other smaller, less wealthy news-distributing agencies. What this means as far as foreign news is concerned is obvious: such corporations have more on-the-spot reporters than others, and therefore their reporters furnish the basis for what participating newspapers, local television stations, and radio stations distribute to their immediate clientele. This sheer mass and density of foreign-news reporting usually means greater authority and hence more frequent citation by people using the news, so that a *New York Times* or CBS report will have credibility by virtue of its source, its institutional prestige, its frequency (daily, hourly, etc.), its air of expertise and experience. Together, the small group of principal news suppliers and the extraordinary array of much smaller suppliers that are independent of and yet in many ways dependent on the giants furnish an *American* image of reality that does have a recognizable coherence.

A very serious consequence is that Americans have scant opportunity to view the Islamic world *except* reductively, coercively, oppositionally. The tragedy of this is that it has spawned a set of counterreductions here and in the Islamic world itself. "Islam" can now have only two possible general meanings, both of them unacceptable and impoverishing. To Westerners and Americans, "Islam" represents a resurgent atavism, which suggests not only the threat of a return to the Middle Ages but the destruction of what is regularly referred to as the democratic order in the Western world. For a great many Muslims, on the other hand, "Islam" stands for a reactive counterresponse to this first image of Islam as a threat. Anything said about "Islam" gets more or less forced into the apologetic form of a statement about Islam's humanism, its contribution to civilization, development, and moral righteousness. That kind of counterresponse has occasionally elicited the foolishness of a counter-counterresponse: trying to equate "Islam" with the immediate situation of one or another Islamic country, or one or another Islamic authority. Then you have Sadat calling Khomeini a lunatic and a disgrace to Islam,

Khomeini returning the compliment, and various people in the United States debating the merits of each case. What is any Islamic apologist to say when confronted with the daily count of people executed by the Islamic Komitehs, or when—as was reported by Reuter's on September 19, 1979—the Ayatollah Khomeini announces that enemies of the Islamic revolution will be destroyed out and out? My point here is that all these relative, reductive meanings of "Islam" depend on one another and are equally to be rejected for perpetuating the double bind.

How dire the consequences of this double bind are can be seen when we consider that United States support of the shah's modernization came to be regarded by Iranians as a rallying cry for opposing him, which was translated into a political interpretation of the monarchy as an affront to Islam; the Islamic revolution set itself in part the goal of resisting United States imperialism, which in turn appeared to resist the Islamic revolution by reinstating the shah symbolically in New York. Thereafter the drama has unfolded as if according to an Orientalist program: the so-called Orientals acting the part decreed for them by what so-called Westerners expect; Westerners confirming their status in Oriental eyes as devils.⁵⁵

Nor is this all: many parts of the Islamic world are now inundated with United States-produced television shows. Like all other residents of the Third World, Muslims tend to be dependent upon a tiny group of news agencies whose job it is to transmit the news back to the Third World, even in the large number of cases where the news is *about* that world. From being the source of news, the Third World generally and Islamic countries in particular have become consumers of news. For the first time in history (for the first time, that is, on such a scale) the Islamic world may be said to be learning *about itself* by means of images, histories, and information manufactured in the West. If one adds to this the fact that students and scholars in the Islamic world are still dependent upon American and European libraries and institutions of

learning for what now passes as Middle Eastern studies (consider that not one really complete and central library of Arabic material exists anywhere in the entire Islamic world), the fact that English is a world language in a way that Arabic, Persian, and Turkish are not, and the fact that for its elite much of the Islamic, economically oil-based world is now producing a managerial class of natives who are indebted for their economies, their defense establishments, and many of their political opportunities to the worldwide consumer-market system controlled in the West, one gets an accurate though extremely depressing picture of what the media revolution, serving a small segment of the societies that produced it, has done to "Islam."⁵⁶

Not that there really is not an Islamic revival independent of the reactive process I have been describing. But it would be more accurate to speak of it in a less undifferentiated way. I for one feel more comfortable *not* using words like "Islam" and "Islamic" except with great restraint and many qualifications, precisely because in many Muslim societies and states (and of course in the West) "Islam" has become a political cover for much that is not at all religious. How then can we begin to discuss Muslim interpretations of Islam, and developments within it, responsibly?

First of all, following Maxime Rodinson, we should isolate the basic teachings of the Muslim religion as contained in the Koran, which is considered to be the word of God.⁵⁷ This is the bedrock identity of Islamic faith, although how it is interpreted and lived immediately moves us away from it. A second level comprises various conflicting interpretations of the Koran that make up the numerous Islamic sects, jurisprudential schools, hermeneutic styles, linguistic theories, and the like. A major tendency within this massive web of derivations from the Koran (most of which have had whole institutions, in some cases societies, built out of them) is what Rodinson has called "a return to the source." This means the impulse radically to get at the pristine spirit of things Islamic,

and it is this impulse which Rodinson likens to a "permanent revolution" within Islam. What he does not say, however, is that all of the monotheistic religions and most ideological movements have this impulse within them; whether Islam is more consistently revolutionary in this regard than the others is very difficult to tell. In any event, "a return to the source" initiates movements (e.g., the Wahhabis or, it is evident, the religious component of the Iranian revolution) whose impact on the society in which they occur varies from place to place and from time to time. Mahdism as an ideology in nineteenth-century Sudan was not the same thing as Mahdism there today. Similarly, the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood during the late 1940s to the mid-1950s was a considerably more powerful ideological movement than today's Brotherhood; and both of those are different in organization and objectives from what is called the Muslim Brotherhood in Syria.

So far we have been speaking in terms of an Islam that is principally, but not exclusively, doctrinal and ideological, and already we have entered a field of considerable variation and contradiction. Already, in fine, the labels "Islam" and "Islamic" have to be used with some indication of *which* (and for that matter, *whose*) Islam one is referring to. The matter is further complicated when we add a third level to our analysis, again following Rodinson. But it is best to quote him at length here:

There is within Islam a third level, which must be carefully distinguished from the other two, comprising the way in which the various ideologies have been lived, the practices to which they have been linked, practices which certainly influenced them if they did not inspire them. The various systems into which Medieval Islam resolved itself were each lived in a different way, transformed from within even where they remained identical in terms of external references and texts. What is at issue here cannot be reduced to a mere contrast between the doctrines and texts of the "heretical" tendencies on the one hand, the Muslim "orthodoxy" recognized by the majority of Muslims on the other.

In a conformist setting, here as elsewhere, it is often the case that the re-interpretation of one phrase of a holy text is enough to bring about an existential change and the adoption of a critical or revolutionary attitude, which may remain an individual attitude or may spread to others. By contrast, it often happens that, as time goes by, a revolutionary or innovative breakthrough comes to be interpreted in a conservative, conformist and quietist sense. There are many examples of such a process, which could indeed be called a general law of ideologies. The evolution of the Ishmaeli "sect" is particularly striking. In the Middle Ages, the Ishmaelists preached revolutionary subversion of the established order. Today, its leaders are the Aga Khans, millionaire potentates whose main concern is to enjoy the *dolce vita* in the company of film stars and celebrities, as the scandal sheets never tire of telling us.

In conclusion, the holy texts make no explicit pronouncements. The cultural tradition in general, be it in its more explicit formulations, its proclamations, its doctrinal texts or in the attitudes evoked by the former, presents a wide variety of aspects and allows one to justify the most mutually contradictory theses.⁵⁸

This level, then, is the third type of interpretation, but it cannot take place without the other two. There can be no Islam without the Koran; conversely, there can be no Koran without Muslims reading it, interpreting it, attempting to translate it into institutions and social realities. Even when there is a strong orthodoxy of interpretation, as in Sunni Islam—Sunna itself meaning orthodoxy based on consensus—there can very easily be revolutionary turmoil. The conflict between the Sadat government in Egypt and the various so-called fundamentalist Muslim parties takes place on the very same disputed ground of orthodoxy, Sadat and his Muslim authorities claiming to be the party of Sunna, his opponents making a very strong case that *they* are the true followers of Sunna.

If we add to these three levels of Islam the considerable numbers of Muslims past, present, and future, the sheer historical duration of "the venture of Islam" (from the seventh

century to the present), the staggeringly varied geographical circumstances of Islamic societies (from China to Nigeria, from Spain to Indonesia, from Russia and Afghanistan to Tunisia), we will, I think, begin to understand the *political* implications of Western media and cultural attempts to call all of this "Islam" *tout court*. And I also think we will begin to sense that various *Islamic* attempts to respond to Islamic as well as Western circumstances, in all their variety and contradiction, are no less political, no less to be analyzed in terms of processes, struggles, and strategies of interpretation.⁵⁹ Let me try now rather sketchily to show what a staggeringly complex set of things is involved, although I should say at the outset that *the* greatest problem is that much of what one has to assess essentially escapes documentation.

We are very far from being able to say whether there is something called "an Islamic history," except as a rudimentary way of distinguishing the Islamic world from, say, Europe or Japan. Beyond that, Islamic and Western scholars are not in agreement as to whether Islam has taken root in certain geographical locations because of ecology or socioeconomic structure or the particular relationship between sedentary and nomadic patterns. As for the periods of Islamic history, these too are so complex as to defy a simple "Islamic" characterization. What are the points of similarity between the Alawi, Ottoman, Safavid, Uzbek, and Mogul states (which represent the great state organizations in Islamic history, until the twentieth century, in India, Turkey, and the Near and Middle East) and the modern Islamic nation-states? How do we explain the difference between (and even the origin of) the so-called Turco-Iranian and Turco-Arabian segments of the Islamic regions? In fine, as Albert Hourani clearly shows, the problems of definition, interpretation, and characterization within Islam itself are so great as to give Western scholars pause (to say nothing of Western nonscholars):

It is clear, then, that words like Islamic history do not mean the same things in different contexts, and that in no context are they

enough by themselves to explain all that exists. In other words, "Islam" and the terms derived from it are "ideal types," to be used subtly, with infinite reservations and adjustments of meaning, and in conjunction with other ideal types, if they are to serve as principles of historical explanation. The extent to which they can be used varies according to the type of history we are writing. They are least relevant to economic history; as Rodinson has shown in *Islam et capitalisme*, the economic life of societies where Islam is dominant cannot be explained primarily in terms of religious beliefs or laws. In spite of the influence of Islamic law on commercial forms, other kinds of explanation are more relevant; as Cahen and others have suggested, concepts such as "Near Eastern," "Mediterranean," "medieval," "preindustrial" society are more useful than that of Islamic. For sociopolitical history, Islam can furnish some elements of explanation but by no means all that are needed. The institutions and policies of even the most fervently "Islamic" states cannot be explained without taking into account geographical position, economic needs, and the interests of dynasties and rulers. Even the history of those institutions that seem to be based upon Islamic law cannot be wholly explained in these terms: a concept like "Islamic slavery" dissolves if one looks at it closely; as Milliot's examination of the *'amal* literature of Morocco suggests, there were always ways in which local customs were incorporated into Islamic law as it was actually practiced. Only some kinds of intellectual history, at least before the modern period, can be explained in mainly Islamic terms, as a process by which ideas from outside were blended with those generated from within Islam itself to form a self-maintaining and self-developing system; even the *falsafa* must now be seen, not as Greek philosophers in Arab clothes, but as Muslims using the concepts and methods of Greek philosophy to give their own explanation of the Islamic faith.⁶⁰

Going still further, we will find no answer from anthropologists as to whether there is a *Homo islamicus*, or whether such a type has any analytical or epistemological value at all. We know much less than we need to know about the distribu-

tion of power and authority in Islamic societies—given that there are so many different ones scattered throughout history and geography—to say how we should assess the relationship between Islamic jurisprudential codes and their enforcement, or concepts of rule and their application, transformation, or persistence. We cannot with real certainty say, for example, whether some or all or any Islamic societies changed the bases of their authority from concepts of the sacred to concepts of legalistic doctrine. Language, aesthetic structures, sociologies of taste, problems of ritual, urban space, population shifts, revolutions of feelings: these are things in relation to context that have barely begun to be studied, either by Muslim or non-Muslim scholars. Is there such a thing as Muslim political behavior? How do class formations occur in Muslim societies, and how do these differ from those in Europe? What are the concepts, the tools of research, the organizational frameworks, the documents by means of which we can locate the best indications of everyday Muslim life in general? Is “Islam” in the end useful as a notion, or does it hide, distort, deflect, and ideologize more than it actually says? Above all, what bearing does the position of the person asking any or all of these questions have on the answers? In what ways is it different for a Muslim theologian to ask them in Iran, in Egypt, in Saudi Arabia, today as opposed to ten years ago? How do those statements compare with questions asked by a Soviet Orientalist, a French Arabist at the Quai d’Orsay, or an American anthropologist at the University of Chicago?

In political terms, what has emerged as a standard Islamic response can be no less reifying, no less unhealthy, no less a cover for a multitude of devastatingly contradictory things than “Islam” is in the West. In nearly every instance, the state in the central Islamic region (from North Africa to South Asia) expresses itself in consciously Islamic terms. This is a political as well as a cultural fact, and it has only just begun to be recognized in the West.⁶¹ Saudi Arabia, for example, is (as its name indicates) the state of the royal house of Saud,

whose victory over the other leading tribes in the region produced the state. What this family says and does in the name of the state and of Islam expresses the family’s power, in addition to what has accrued to it as a member of the international community and what it has gathered to itself by way of considerable authority and legitimacy with regard to its people. Similar things can be said of Jordan, Iraq, Kuwait, Syria, prerevolutionary Iran, and Pakistan, except that it is not true in all instances that the ruling oligarchy is a family. But it is true that in numerous cases a relative minority—whether a religious sect, a single party, a family, or a regional grouping—dominates all others in the name of the state and of Islam. Lebanon and Israel are exceptions: both belong *in* the Islamic world, but in one a Christian minority rules, in the other a Jewish. But they too express some considerable part of their hegemony in religious terms.

To a very large degree all of these states, each in its own way, have felt themselves to be responding to outside threats and have had recourse to religion, tradition, or nationalism reactively. Yet no one of them—and this is the main point—is free from an extraordinarily difficult dilemma. On the one hand, the state structure is not completely sensitive to the plurality of nationalities, religions, and sects contained within it. Thus in Saudi Arabia various tribes or clans feel themselves perhaps constrained by a state calling itself the Arabia of the Saud clan; and in Iran to this day, the state structure effectively stifles Azerbaijanis, Baluchis, Kurds, Arabs, and others, who feel their individual ethnic existence compromised as a result. The same tension on a wider front is repeated in Syria, Jordan, Iraq, Lebanon, and Israel. On the other hand, the dominant power in each of these states has used a national or religious ideology to give an appearance of unity against what are perceived as outside threats. This is clearly the case in Saudi Arabia, where Islam is the only ideological current wide and legitimate enough to rally people to it. In Saudi Arabia and in postrevolutionary Iran “Islam” has consequently come to be

identified with national security; that these politics also fulfill the Western stereotype of Islam brings even more pressure, both external and internal, upon them.

Thus, far from being a uniform or even a coherent movement, "the return to Islam" embodies a number of political actualities. For the United States it represents an image of disruption to be resisted at some times, encouraged at others. We speak of the anticommunist Saudi Muslims, of the valiant Muslim rebels of Afghanistan, of "reasonable" Muslims like Sadat, the Saudi royal family, and Zia al-Haqq. Yet we also rail at Khomeini's Islamic militants and Qaddafi's Islamic "Third Way," and in our morbid fascination with "Islamic punishment" (as administered by Khalkali) we paradoxically strengthen its power as an authority-maintaining device. In Egypt the Muslim Brotherhood, in Saudi Arabia the Muslim militants who took the Medina mosque, in Syria the Islamic Brotherhoods and Vanguardians who oppose the Baath party regime, in Iran the Islamic Mujahideen, as well as the Fedayeen and the liberals: these make up a small part of what is an adversarial current running through the nation, although we know very little about it. In addition, the various Muslim nationalities whose identities have been blocked in various post-colonial states clamor for *their* Islam. And beneath all this—in madrasas, mosques, clubs, brotherhoods, guilds, parties, universities, movements, villages, and urban centers all through the Islamic world—surge still more varieties of Islam, many of them claiming to guide their members back to "the true Islam."⁶²

Only the tiniest fraction of this diverse Muslim energy is available to the Westerner now being asked by the media and by government spokesmen to consider "Islam." The most serious misrepresentations occur when Islamic "resurgence" is solicited.⁶³ In the minds and hearts of its adherents, surely Islam has always been resurgent, alive, rich in thought, feeling, and human production. And always in the thoughts of the faithful the "Islamic vision" (in W. Montgomery Watt's use-

ful phrase⁶⁴) has involved them in creative dilemmas. What is justice? what is evil? When are orthodoxy and tradition to be relied on? when is *ijtihad* (individual interpretation) in order? The questions multiply, and the work gets done—yet we in the West see or hear little of it. So much of Islamic life is neither bound by texts nor confined to personalities or neat structures as to make the overused word "Islam" an unreliable index of what we try to apprehend.

Nevertheless the conflict between "Islam" and "the West" is very real. One tends to forget that all wars have two sets of trenches, two sets of barricades, two military machines. And just as the war with Islam seems to have unified the West around opposition to Islam's power, so too did the war with the West unify many sectors of the Islamic world. For if Islam is a comparatively recent factor in the United States, for many Muslims the United States has seemed part of the West and has therefore been a phenomenon much deliberated upon for decades in many Islamic circles. Numerous Western scholars of Islamic culture tend, I think, to exaggerate the impact of "the West" upon Islamic thought during the last two hundred years, and they wrongly assume that "the West" and "modernization" have long occupied the center of Islamic awareness, from the Atlantic to the Gulf. That is not true, simply because like all societies Islamic ones focus on some things sometimes, on others at other times. But it is true that "the West" has furnished reams of polemics, treatises, and interpretative feats, as well as providing numerous personalities, parties, and movements in the Islamic world with various projects and tasks.⁶⁵ But it would be wrong and condescending to conceive of the whole Islamic world as bothered only by what after all is external to it.

It is also very important to remember that one of the great hallmarks of Islamic culture is its rich and vastly ingenious interpretative energy. While it is perhaps true that Islam has produced no very powerful visual aesthetic tradition, it is more interesting and no less true that few civilizations have

encouraged the arts of verbal interpretation on so wide a scale as Islam. Whole institutions, whole traditions, whole schools of thought are built out of such things as a system of commentary, a linguistic theory, a hermeneutical performance. Not that we do not find the same things in other religious traditions; we do, but it needs to be remembered that the oral and verbal experiences in Islam developed with less competition, with more exclusiveness of domain, than elsewhere. No wonder, then, that the new Iranian constitution specified a *faqih* as the nation's guide; a *faqih* being, not a philosopher-king as the media seemed to believe, but literally a master of *fiqh*, of jurisprudential hermeneutics—in other words, a great reader.

Both the Islamic community of interpretation and the Western or American community as formed mainly by the mass media have tragically staked much of their energies on the narrow point of confrontation between them, and in the process have ignored what did not concern this confrontation. Since we have been all too ready to believe this about Muslims opposing "satanic" America, it is worthwhile to pay attention to some of what has actually happened. While it is undoubtedly true that control of "news" and "images" in the West is not in Muslim hands, it is no less true that only an over-all Muslim delay in understanding the reasons for Muslim dependence prevents their doing something about it. The oil-rich states, for their part, cannot complain that resources are lacking. What is lacking is some concerted political decision to enter the world in earnest, a lack which proves that far from being a united force the Muslim states are not yet politically mobilized or coherent. There are many talents that need to be encouraged first, not least among them the capacity to produce and articulate a conscious and forceful self-image. But this means a serious assessment of the positive (not merely the reactive and defensive) values for which Muslims, in many different ways, stand. A great debate on this subject, usually in the form of discussions of *turath* (that is, the specifically Is-

lamic heritage) has been going on in the Muslim world:⁶⁶ now its findings and its issues need to be communicated to the rest of the world. There is no longer much excuse for bewailing the hostility of "the West" towards the Arabs and Islam and then sitting back in outraged righteousness. When the reasons for this hostility and those aspects of "the West" that encourage it are fearlessly analyzed, an important step has been taken towards changing it, but that is by no means the whole way: something must be put in its place if a new mass of anti-Islamic propaganda is not to result. Certainly there are great dangers today in actually *following*, actually *fulfilling*, the prevailing hostile image of Islam, though that has thus far only been the doing of *some* Muslims and *some* Arabs and *some* black Africans. But such fulfillments underline the importance of what still has to be done.

In the great rush to industrialize, modernize, and develop themselves, many Muslim countries have sometimes been too compliant, I think, about turning themselves into consumer markets. To dispel the myths and stereotypes of Orientalism, the world as a whole has to be given an opportunity, by the media and by Muslims themselves, to see Muslims and Orientals producing and, more important, diffusing a different form of history, a new kind of sociology, a new cultural awareness: in short, Muslims need to emphasize the goal of living a new form of history, investigating what Marshall Hodgson has called the Islamicate world⁶⁷ and its many different societies with such seriousness of purpose and urgency as also to communicate the results outside the Muslim world. Surely that is what Ali Shariati had in mind for Iranian Muslims when he universalized Mohammed's migration (*hejira*) from Mecca to Medina into the idea of man as "a choice, a struggle, a constant becoming. He is an infinite migration, a migration within himself, from clay to God; he is a migrant within his own soul."⁶⁸

Ideas like Shariati's informed the Iranian revolution in its early phases, which once and for all dismissed the dogmatic-

cally held supposition that Muslims were essentially incapable either of true revolution or of categorically throwing off tyranny and injustice. More important even than that, the Iranian revolution in its early phases demonstrated—as Shariati always argued—that Islam had to be lived as an invigorating existential challenge to man, not as a passive submission to authority, human or divine. In a world without “fixed standards” and with only a divine injunction to “migrate” from human clay to God, the Muslim, according to Shariati, had to carve a path of his own. Human society was itself a migration, or rather a vacillation, between “the pole of Cain” (ruler, king, aristocracy: power concentrated in one individual) and the “pole of Abel” (the class of the people, what the Koran calls *al-nass*: democracy, subjectivity, community).⁶⁰ Ayatollah Khomeini’s moral teachings at first were just as compelling as this: with less suppleness than Shariati he also understood the Muslim predicament as a constantly lived choice between *hallal* and *haram* (righteousness and evil). Hence his call for an “Islamic” republic, by which he intended to institutionalize righteousness and rescue *al-mostazafin* (the oppressed) from their plight.

Such ideas of course produced an immense upheaval in Iran. In the West, however, the Islamic revolution brought forth no sympathetic attention. Even in Islamic countries, the Iranian experience was feared for its energy, its fire, its disruptive, almost millenarian enthusiasm. So in the Islamic world there runs a broad cleavage between official, orthodox views of Islamic life and, opposing that in many different forms, a countercultural Islam one of whose vanguard expressions was the Iranian revolution.⁷⁰ The irony is that Western views of Islam on the whole prefer to associate “Islam” with what many Muslims themselves are opposed to in the current scene: punishment, autocracy, medieval modes of logic, theocracy.

III. *The Princess Episode in Context*

Still, the Islam before us is attenuated perforce by our power to represent it for our purposes, and reduced for the occasion by a state, a government, a group in response to us: this is a far thing from Islam as such, and at present the encounter between “us” and “them” does neither very much credit. More significantly, in what it covers it hides far more than it explicitly reveals. An analysis of one notorious episode will illustrate what I mean.

On May 12, 1980, the Public Broadcasting Service ran the film *Death of a Princess*, which had been made by Anthony Thomas, a British film maker. A month before, the film had created a diplomatic incident between the United Kingdom and Saudi Arabia, resulting in the withdrawal of the Saudi ambassador from London, the boycott of England as a Saudi vacation spot, and the threat of further sanctions. Why? Because, according to the Saudis, the film insulted Islam and gave an erroneous picture of Arab society in general and Saudi justice in particular. Based on the well-known execution of a young princess and her commoner lover, the film was

done in the docu-drama form of a search for truth: a British reporter tries to find out exactly what happened to the couple and in so doing travels to Beirut, where he talks to Lebanese and Palestinians, then to Saudi Arabia, where he is, of course, given the official run-around. In the process he learns only that the princess's story was interpreted by the people with whom he spoke as a symbol of their political and moral dilemmas. For the Palestinians she is, like them, an outcast in search of freedom and political self-expression. For some Lebanese she typifies the inter-Arab struggle that tore Lebanon apart. For official Saudis she is no one's business but theirs; they say that Westerners find her case interesting only because it discredits the regime. Finally, for a small handful of insiders, her plight is an indictment of the regime's hypocrisy, in which "Islam" and the Islamic *lex talionis* are used to cover up the royal family's corruption. The film's conclusion is open-ended: all the explanations have some truth to them, although no one of them seems adequate to cover what apparently happened.

In the United States, the Saudi government made known its opposition to the film's showing; two unpopular results were that Warren Christopher of the State Department brought the Saudis' displeasure publicly to PBS's attention, and Exxon took out advertisements in leading newspapers asking PBS to "review" its decision. In several cities the showing was canceled. As a concession to the film's controversial nature, PBS ran a sixty-minute panel discussion immediately following the broadcast. Six individuals plus a moderator talked about the film: one was the Arab League representative, another a Harvard law professor, a third a Boston-area Muslim clergyman, a fourth a young American "Arabist" (an unusual designation for someone who is neither an academic nor a government officer); then there were a young woman with business and journalistic experience in the Middle East, and finally, a British journalist who was honest in his dislike of the Saudi scene. Together these six individuals delivered a

reasonably incoherent hour of talk. Those who knew something about the region were often bound by their positions to stick to an officially apologetic "Muslim" line. Those who knew only a little showed it, of course, and the rest were fairly irrelevant.

Pressures against showing the film correctly raised First Amendment questions, and I believe it should have been shown. The important unstated things about the film (which as a work of cinematic art was, in my opinion, quite banal) were (a) that it was *not* made by a Muslim, (b) that it was likely to be the only, or if not the only, then certainly the most impressive film about Muslims the average viewer was likely to see, and (c) that discussions of the film, both during the panel show and elsewhere, very rarely touched on the questions of context, power, and representation. Thomas's undertaking obviously had the ready-made glamour that a film about Yemen, for example, would not have: sex and "Islamic" punishment (particularly of the sort confirming "our" worst suspicions of Muslim barbarity) dressed up as an earnest docu-drama could get a very wide audience. As *The Economist* said in April 1980: "Islamic law to most Westerners means Islamic punishment: a simplified myth that this film will have fostered." The audience became still wider once it was known that the Saudi government had been pulling strings (involving Exxon to boot) in the background. And all of this emphasized that *Death of a Princess* was clearly *not* a Muslim film but a film about which Muslims had only very limited, relatively unpopular, and ineffective things to say.

The film makers and PBS had to be conscious—as indeed any Muslim or Third World individual would be conscious—that no matter what the film contained, the making of it, the very act of representing scenes in images, was a prerogative deriving from what I have elsewhere called cultural power, in this case the West's cultural power.⁷¹ It was simply irrelevant that the Saudis have more money: the actual production and distribution of news and of images were more

powerful than money because these, more than mere capital, were the system that counted in the West. As against this system, official Saudi objections about the film being an insult to Islam were in their turn an attempt to mobilize another, far weaker system of representation—the regime's self-image as a defender of Islam—in order to neutralize the so-called Western one.

There was a further victory for the system in PBS's panel discussion. On the one hand, the network could accurately claim to have responded to Saudi unhappiness by sensitively airing a discussion of issues; on the other hand, PBS controlled the discussion by making certain that a "balance" of views, disparate and not very well articulated by relatively unknown "representative" individuals, would blunt any intense or protracted analysis. The appearance alone of a discussion served as a substitute for careful analysis. It was part of the event's success that no one commented on how both the film's *Rashomon*-style structure and the "balanced" panel left judgment on the actual subject—a contemporary Muslim society—misleadingly open-ended. We never know (and perhaps do not really care) what the princess actually did, just as we had the panel saying "the film was bad" as well as "it was honest and good." But underlying both film and discussion is the unacknowledged fact that such a film *could* be made and shown with far more serious consequences than a Saudi film that was considered damaging to Christianity, the United States, or President Carter.

Besides seeking actively to prevent the film from being shown, the Saudi regime was put in the position of denying something—the incident itself—it really could not deny and at the same time being unable to offer anything as a counter-version of Islam. The reductive double bind I spoke about earlier rendered any such objections to the film ineffective. For either one could say, No, that is not really like that, or it is *this* way, provided of course there was some way of saying such a thing effectively, as well as some place in which

to stand and say it. For the official Saudi spokesperson there was no way and no place, except in the culturally discredited mode of attempting to prevent the film from being shown at all. Saudi officials made some halfhearted efforts to suggest "good" aspects of Islam, but these did not resonate in the debate. Worse, there seemed to be no American constituency strong enough on cultural grounds to point out that the film was too inconsequential either as art or as politics to communicate anything of great moment. Unfortunately there was nothing worse, both in the United States and in England, than for opponents of the film to appear to be lackeys of Saudi financial interests (as was suggested with unconcealed contempt by J. B. Kelly in the *New Republic*, May 17, 1980). In fine, the film's opponents commanded no apparatus of diffusion by means of which to challenge the film critically. How trite the controversy was is quickly made evident when it is compared with the debate over Marcel Ophüls' *The Memory of Justice* or over *Holocaust* or when various Leni Riefenstahl films were revived.

The *Death of a Princess* showing enabled one to note more things than that. Both the American media and the surrounding intellectual and cultural milieu, well before *Princess* was ever heard of, had been literally teeming with overt anti-Islamic and anti-Arab slurs. On at least two occasions in the past, a Saudi Arabian king was directly insulted by New York City's mayor, who refused to greet him or show him even the commonest form of courtesy. Assiduous research has shown that there is hardly a prime-time television show without several episodes of patently racist and insulting caricatures of Muslims, all of whom tend to be represented in unqualified categorical and generic terms: one Muslim is therefore seen to be typical of all Muslims and of Islam in general.⁷² High school textbooks, novels, films, advertisements: how many of them are really informative about, much less complimentary to, Islam? How widespread is knowledge of the difference between Shi'a and Sunni Islam? Not at all. Consider the general

humanities courses offered by our own universities: most if not all of them in their syllabuses equate "the humanities" with the line of masterpieces that goes from Homer and the Attic tragedians to Dostoevsky and T. S. Eliot via the Bible, Shakespeare, Dante, and Cervantes. Where does the civilization of Islam, adjacent to Christian Europe, fit into such an ethnocentric scheme of things? Barring very recent books with titles like *Militant Islam* or *The Dagger of Islam* or *Ayatollah Khomeini's Mein Kampf*, what general work on the civilization of Islam is widely circulated, or referred to, or sought out? Would it be possible to identify a sector of the population as Islamophiles, the way we could name Anglophiles, Francophiles, and the like?

After the *Princess* controversy died down, the Saudis unfortunately forgot to take offense when the *American Spectator* published an article by Eric Hoffer called "Muhammad's Sloth," subtitled "Muhammad, Messenger of Plod."⁷² Nor did they include in their list of misperceptions of Islam some reminder that the only three countries in the world whose territory was under occupation by a United States ally were Islamic states. Only when the royal family's reputation was directly tarnished did the Saudi regime threaten punishment. How was it that Islam was injured only in the one instance and not in the others? Why until the present have the Saudis done relatively little to help promote an understanding of Islam? Hitherto their major educational contribution has been to the University of Southern California's Middle East Studies Program, which is run by a former ARAMCO employee.⁷⁴

The full context of the *Death of a Princess* episode is still more complex, however. United States military intervention in the Gulf has been a common topic of discussion for at least five years. Ever since late 1978, when the Saudis did not join the Camp David peace process, articles (some of them crammed with authentic-looking disinformation) highlighting the regime's numerous faults and weaknesses have cropped up regularly. It was acknowledged in late July 1980 that the CIA

was behind some of these stories: see "The Washington Leak That Went Wrong: A CIA Gaffe That Shocked Saudi Arabia," by David Leigh (*Washington Post*, July 30, 1980). For the first sixteen years of its existence the *New York Review of Books* more or less ignored the Persian Gulf: then during the one year immediately following Camp David it published several articles on the Gulf, all of them stressing the fragility of the present Saudi ruling arrangement. At the same time, the daily press discovered Islam's ascendancy and the medieval attributes of its punishments, jurisprudence, and conception of women; no one remarked at the same time that Israeli rabbis expressed remarkably similar views on women or on non-Jews, personal hygiene, and punishment, or that various Lebanese clerics were just as bloodthirsty and medieval in their outlook. The selectivity of focus on Saudi Arabia's Islamic regime seemed orchestrated around its vulnerability and its peculiarity, none of which made it any less vulnerable and peculiar. But the intention seemed to be that because it had defied the United States, Saudi Arabia should now endure the benefit of "honest" reporting, as well as submit to demands for ending cover-ups of Saudi censorship (whereas no one complained about the fact that every news item coming out of Israel had to pass the military censor). There was widespread outrage routinely expressed at the absence of freedom of the press in Saudi Arabia. (How many feelings of outrage were expressed about Israeli rules against Arab newspapers, schools, and universities on the West Bank?) Saudi Arabia all of a sudden became a unique case to be upbraided by liberals and Zionists in one chorus, praised and nearly coddled by conservative financiers and senior establishment figures in another. This further demoted Saudi Arabia, made it more unacceptable and intellectually preposterous.

One result of all this was that when the *Princess* film episode occurred "we" loudly deplored "their" hypocrisy and corruption, "they" in their turn resented our power and our insensitivity. The confrontation further channeled the range of

discussion between "us" and "them," making true discussion, analysis, and exchange virtually out of the question. Muslim self-identity has consequently tended to be strengthened by losing encounters with a monolithic block representing itself as "Western civilization," and sensing this, the West's own demagogues inveigh against medieval fanaticism and cruel tyranny. For almost every Muslim, the mere assertion of an Islamic identity becomes an act of nearly cosmic defiance and a necessity for survival. War seems an extremely logical outcome.

Another, this time unforeseen, nonmilitary result is that some people here and in the Islamic world may discover the deplorable limits of coercive labels like "the West" and "Islam." Perhaps it is too much to expect that these labels and the frameworks supporting them will thereby lose their imprisoning force, but it is probable that "Islam" will seem less monolithic and frightening and more the result of interpretations that serve our immediate political purposes and characterize our anxieties, whether "we" happen to be Muslims or non-Muslims. Once we finally grasp the sheer power and the subjective components of interpretation, and once we recognize that many of the things we know are *ours* in more ways than we normally admit, we are well on our way to disposing of some naiveté, a great deal of bad faith, and many myths about ourselves and the world we live in. Thus to understand even "the news" is in a certain sense to understand what we are and how a certain sector of the society in which we live works. Only after we have understood those things can we go on to grasp the "Islam" that is ours and the different kinds of Islam that exist for Muslims.


Let us now try to analyze in detail what has been the most troubling episode between "us" and "Islam": the Iranian hostage crisis. There is much to be seen and much political confusion to dispel in this episode, both because it has been so traumatic and dense for us and because, looked at critically, it

says many things about processes now at work in the Muslim world. Once we have approached Iran, we can then go on to discuss the broader issues linking Islam and the West in this latest phase.

CHAPTER TWO

THE IRAN STORY

I. *Holy War*

 Iran has aroused seething passions in Americans, not only because of the deeply insulting and unlawful seizure of the Teheran embassy, which was occupied by Iranian students on November 4, 1979, but also as a result of the incredibly detailed, highly focused attention of the media to the event. It is one thing to know that the country's diplomats have been seized and that Americans seem incapable of freeing them; it is quite another thing to watch that taking place night after night on prime-time television. But we have reached a point, I think, where there is some need to evaluate critically the meaning of "the Iran story," as it has been called, to understand its presence in the American consciousness rationally and dispassionately, especially since around ninety percent of what Americans have recently come to know about Iran they know through radio, television, and newspapers. There is no way of mitigating the hurt and outrage caused by the holding of the American hostages, nor the confusion caused by the conflicts within the Islamic world, but in my opinion we should feel grateful that, except on one occasion, the United States did not use military force. In any event,

we must start to take stock of what Iran has been to Americans in the general context of United States and Western relations with the Islamic world: how it has looked, how it was literally presented and re-presented to Americans by the media day after day.

Iran took up much of the nightly network news immediately after the embassy was seized. For several months ABC scheduled a daily late-evening special, *America Held Hostage*, and PBS's *MacNeil/Lehrer Report* ran an unprecedented number of shows on the crisis. For months Walter Cronkite would add to his "that's the way it is" a reminder of how many days the hostages had been in captivity: "the two-hundred and seventh day," and so on. Hodding Carter, the State Department spokesman during the period, achieved star status within about two weeks; on the other hand, neither then Secretary Cyrus Vance nor Zbigniew Brzezinski was very much in evidence until after the abortive rescue effort in late April 1980. Interviews with Abolhassan Bani-Sadr, with Sadegh Ghotbzadeh, with parents of the hostages, alternated regularly with Iranian demonstrations, three-minute courses on the history of Islam, bulletins from the ex-shah's hospital, solemn-faced commentators and experts analyzing, reflecting, debating, haranguing, and advancing theories, courses of action, speculations about the future interpretations of events, psychologies, Soviet moves, and Muslim reactions: and still the fifty-odd Americans remained incarcerated.

Throughout the period, it became evident that the Iranians were using the media to what they considered their advantage, a consideration certainly not lost on the networks. Frequently, the students in the embassy would schedule "events" to meet satellite deadlines and nightly news broadcasts in the United States. From time to time Iranian officials indicated that it was their plan thus to turn the American people against the policy of their government. This was a bad miscalculation at the outset. Later on the policy had a peculiar, not altogether unwelcome effect, which was to stimu-

late the media to a more genuinely investigative attitude. But what I want to discuss here is how Iran appeared to Americans during the most intense period of crisis; the other side of the story has to be subordinated to this concern.

As I said in Chapter One, much of the most dramatic news of the past decade, including not only Iran but the Arab-Israeli conflict, oil, and Afghanistan, has been news of "Islam." Nowhere was this more evident than in the long Iranian crisis during which the American consumer of news was given a sustained diet of information about a people, a culture, a religion—really no more than a poorly defined and badly misunderstood abstraction—always, in the case of Iran, represented as militant, dangerous, and anti-American.

What makes the Iran crisis a good occasion for examining the media's performance is exactly what made it understandably agonizing for so many Americans: its duration and the fact that what Iran came to symbolize represented American relations with the Muslim world. Nevertheless, I think we must look carefully at what, over the initial period of two or three months, became apparent in the media's attitudes and in their doing things in such a way as simply to perpetuate these attitudes, despite the new challenges, the unprecedented political changes and crises the West will have to face from now on. In time, though, there were changes in media reporting, and these on the whole tell a more encouraging story than what appeared at the outset.

To sift through the immense amount of material generated by the takeover of the United States Embassy in Teheran, which is likely to have ended when this book appears, is to be struck by a number of things. First of all, it seemed that "we" were at bay, and with us the normal, democratic, rational order of things. Out there, writhing in self-provoked frenzy, was "Islam" in general, whose manifestation of the hour was a disturbingly neurotic Iran. "An Ideology of Martyrdom" ran the title of a prominent box about Iranian Shi'a

Islam in *Time's* November 26 issue; concurrently, as if copying the same testimony, *Newsweek* featured a page entitled "Iran's Martyr Complex," also on November 26.

There seemed to be plenty of evidence around for that. On November 7 the *St. Louis Post Dispatch* had printed the proceedings of a workshop held in St. Louis on Iran and the Persian Gulf. One expert was quoted as saying that "the loss of Iran to an Islamic form of government was the greatest setback the United States has had in recent years." Islam, in other words, is by definition inimical to United States interests. The *Wall Street Journal* had editorialized on November 20 that "civilization receding" came from "the decline of the Western powers that spread these [civilized] ideals to begin with," as if not to be Western—the fate of most of the world's population, Islam's included—is not to have any civilized ideals. And there was Professor J. C. Hurewitz of Columbia University, who, when asked by an ABC reporter on November 21 whether to be a Muslim Shi'ite meant being "anti-American," responded with a categorical affirmative.

All the major television commentators, Walter Cronkite of CBS and Frank Reynolds of ABC chief among them, spoke regularly of "Muslim hatred of this country" or more poetically of "the crescent of crisis, a cyclone hurtling across a prairie" (Reynolds, ABC, November 21); on another occasion (December 7) Reynolds voiced-over a picture of crowds chanting "God is great" with what he supposed was the crowd's true intention: "hatred of America." Later in the same program we were informed that the Prophet Mohammed was "a self-proclaimed prophet" (which prophet hasn't been?) and then reminded that "Ayatollah" is "a self-styled twentieth-century title" meaning "reflection of God" (unfortunately, neither is completely accurate). The ABC short (three-minute) course in Islam was held in place with small titles to the right of the picture, and these told the same unpleasant story of how resentment, suspicion, and contempt were a proper response to "Islam": Mohammedanism, Mecca,

purdah, chador, Sunni, Shi'ite (accompanied by a picture of young men beating themselves), mullah, Ayatollah Khomeini, Iran. Immediately after these images the program switched to Jamesville, Wisconsin, whose admirably wholesome school-children—no purdah, self-flagellation, or mullahs among them—were organizing a patriotic "Unity Day."

"Militant Islam: The Historic Whirlwind" announced the *New York Times Sunday Magazine* on January 6, 1980; "The Islam Explosion" was the contribution of Michael Walzer in the *New Republic's* December 8 issue. Both essays, like all the others, purported not only to prove that Islam was one unchanging thing that could be grasped over and above the remarkably varied history, geography, social structure, and culture of the forty Islamic nations and the approximately 800,000,000 Muslims who live in Asia, Africa, Europe, and North America (including many millions in the Soviet Union and China), but also to reveal—as Walzer has it—that wherever there has been murder, war, protracted conflict involving special horrors, "Islam clearly played an important part." It did not seem to matter that the normal rules for evidence had been suspended, or that the writer knew neither the languages nor the societies on which he pronounced, or that common sense simply withdrew when "Islam" was discussed. The *New Republic's* lead editorial reduced Iran to "the rage of thwarted religious passion" and to "Islam amok," arguing learnedly what the Shari'a, "the holy law of Islam," has to say on spying, safe-conduct, and the like. All of this reinforced the main point that if Islam is at war with us, we had better join battle with our eyes open.

There were slightly more subtle ways of incriminating "Islam" than the *New Republic's*. One was to put an expert before the public and have him or her suggest that even though Khomeini was not really "representative of Islamic clergy" (this was L. Dean Brown, former United States ambassador to Jordan and special envoy to Lebanon, now president of the Middle East Institute, speaking on the MacNeil/

Lehrer Report November 16), the "ironclad" mullah was a throwback to an earlier (obviously more authentic) Islamic age; the mobs in Teheran reminded Brown of Nuremberg, just as the street demonstrations were signs of "the circus as principal entertainment" habitually provided by dictators.

Another method was to suggest that invisible lines connected various other aspects of the Middle East to Iranian Islam, then damn them together, implicitly or explicitly depending on the case. When former Senator James Abourezk went to Teheran, the announcement on ABC and CBS was made with a reminder that Abourezk was "of Lebanese origin." No reference was ever made to Representative George Hansen's Danish background, or to Ramsey Clark's WASP ancestry. Somehow it was considered important to touch on the vaguely Islamic taint in Abourezk's past, although he happens to be of Christian Lebanese stock. (A related matter was the use of bogus Arab "sheiks" as decoys in the Abscam case.)

Much the most flamboyant use of suggestion originated in a small front-page item by Daniel B. Drooz in the *Atlanta Constitution* on November 8, alleging that the Palestine Liberation Organization was behind the embassy takeover. His sources were "diplomatic and European intelligence" authorities. George Ball stated gnomically in the *Washington Post* on December 9 that "there is some basis to believe that the whole operation is being orchestrated by well-trained Marxists." On December 10, NBC's *Today Show* ran an interview with Amos Perlemutter and Hasi Camel, identified principally as "a professor at American University" and "a correspondent for the Paris weekly *L'Express*." In fact both men are Israelis. Robert Abernethy questioned them on their allegations about "a coincidence of interests" between the Soviet Union, the PLO, and "radical" Muslims in Iran: was it true, he asked, that all three forces were *actually* involved in the embassy operation? Well, no, they replied, but there was this coincidence of interests. When Abernethy volunteered politely that what they were saying sounded like some Israeli attempts to

"tarnish the image of the PLO," Professor Perlemutter angrily demurred, citing nothing less than "intellectual integrity" as his platform.

Not to be outdone, CBS introduced its *Nightly News* on December 12 with Marvin Kalb from the State Department quoting those same (equally unnamed) "diplomatic and intelligence" sources referred to by Drooz a month earlier, in which it was once again affirmed that the PLO, Islamic fundamentalists, and the Soviet Union had cooperated at the embassy. The PLO men were the ones who mined the compound, Kalb said; this was known, he went on sagely, by virtue of "the sounds of Arabic" that could be heard inside the embassy. (A brief report of Kalb's "story" was carried the next day in the *Los Angeles Times*.) It remained for no less a personage than Hudson Institute expert Constantine Menges to argue exactly the same thesis, first in the *New Republic* of December 15, 1979, then twice more on the *MacNeil/Lehrer Report*. No more evidence was given, except of course the diabolism of communism in natural alliance with the devilish PLO and satanic Muslims. (One wonders why MacNeil and Lehrer did not invite Menges back to comment either on the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan or on official Iranian criticism of it.)

"Where there are Shi'ites, there is trouble," Daniel B. Drooz argued in the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* on November 29. Or as the *New York Times* put it more judiciously in a small headline November 18: "Embassy seizure is linked to both Shi'ite approval of authority and anger over the Shah." Within a week after the embassy occupation took place on November 4, pictures of a scowling Ayatollah Khomeini were as frequent and unchanging in what they were supposed to be telling the viewer as the endless pictures of vast Iranian mobs. The burning (and selling) of Iranian flags by irate Americans became a regular pastime; the press faithfully reported this kind of patriotism. Interestingly, there were frequent reports showing the popular confusion between Arabs and Iranians,

such as the one carried by the *Boston Globe* on November 10 of an angry Springfield crowd chanting "Arab go home". Special features on Shi'a Islam proliferated everywhere, although it is surprising how relatively few articles treated Iran's *modern* history, or referred to the singularly important political resistance of the Persian clerics both to foreign intervention and to the monarchy since the late nineteenth century, or even considered how it was that Khomeini was able to bring down the shah and an undefeated army with radio cassettes and largely unarmed popular masses as his major instruments.

Symbolic in a small way, perhaps, was Walter Cronkite's inability to pronounce names correctly. Ghotbzadeh's name was changed nearly every time it was pronounced, usually into something like "Gaboosaday." (On November 28 CBS called Beheshti "Bashati," and not to be left out, ABC on December 7 changed Montazeri's name to "Montessori.") Almost every capsule history of Islam was either so confusing as to be nonsensical or so inaccurate as to appear frightening. Take, as an example, a CBS *Nightly News* segment on Islam November 21. Moharram was described by reporter Randy Daniels as a period when Shi'ite Muslims "celebrated Mohammed's challenge to world leaders"—a statement so wrong as to be silly. Moharram is an Islamic month; Shi'ite Muslims commemorate the martyrdom of Hussein during the first ten days of Moharram. Later we were informed that the Shi'ites have a persecution complex, so "no wonder they produced a Khomeini"; it was reassuring, though no less misleading, to be told that he does not represent Islam as a whole. In the same program I was interviewed for my wisdom, and mistakenly identified as a professor of Islamic studies. On November 27 a CBS reporter informed us that all of Iran was suffering from "revolutionary hangover," as if Iran were the corner drunk.

But it was when the maximum authority of the elite *New York Times* was brought to bear upon Islam that the truly depressing nature of what force "held America hostage" stood forth. The *Times's* Islam, however, had a great deal to do with what the *Times* is. It is not only that it is America's leading

newspaper, but that taken together its catholicity, level of expert reporting, responsibility, and most important, its ability to write credibly from the viewpoint of national security give it a force of unique gravity. In other words, the *Times* can speak authoritatively about a subject and also make that subject pertinent to the nation; it does so deliberately and, it seems, successfully. Thus Harrison Salisbury recalls that in the spring of 1961 President Kennedy told Turner Catledge of the *Times* that had the paper printed more details about the impending Bay of Pigs invasion (which the *Times* had gathered on its own), "you would have saved us from a colossal mistake."¹ After the Bay of Pigs, Salisbury says, neither the *Times* nor the world yet understood that Tad Szulc's reporting was not exceptional, and for that matter, that what the newspaper accomplished was not exceptional either. It was simply a matter of routine. The *Times* had become an extraordinarily strong institution functioning as a power almost coeval with the nation itself.

The *Times* had now reached a critical mass, not a mass in terms of readers and advertisers, although this was inextricably linked to it. No, it had reached a critical mass of reporting and expertise. It now genuinely covered the world, covered Washington, covered the nation and the city with its own staff men and women, and these were not merely journeymen. They were the best reporters and editors who could be obtained. They had gathered on *The Times* not because of monetary rewards—*The Times's* pay scale was good but had never been spectacular. They had gathered because *The Times* offered a unique outlet for reporting and editing. Nowhere were standards of professionalism so high. The critical mass of reporters now [after the Bay of Pigs] was of such size and quality that it functioned almost without conscious direction. All over the world *Times* men were ranging, news tentacles acutely inclined, probing and digging and asking questions.²

Thus in due course, wielding power decisively had come to be the paper's collective mission, and reporters did their *Times* reporting more or less as a matter of habit, "without

conscious direction." By 1971, when the *Times* began publishing the Pentagon Papers, a hundred years had passed since it had brought down the Boss Tweed clique at Tammany Hall by publishing the relevant government documents. Here it was again, according to Salisbury, going beyond the law with its exemplary moral prescience, acting in the national interest,³ demonstrating its power to expose the truth and to move governments. Its financial success under its most recent managing editor, A. M. Rosenthal, was, it is true, the result of adding features like the "Home" and "Living" sections to the daily edition; but the added revenue made possible expanded foreign reporting too.

The new sections had given the paper a financial floor that made its position virtually unassailable, and this at a moment when the *News* and the *Post* were floundering. Now, unlike any other paper in the country, *The Times* could and did throw \$30,000 a month, maybe \$50,000 a month, over and above salaries and staff into covering the fall of Iran; the money was there, no strain.⁴

At the end of the year during which Iran "fell" the *Times* turned to Islam at last. On December 11 a full two pages were devoted to a symposium entitled "The Explosion in the Moslem World." The seven participants included three scholars from the Muslim world who were now living and working in the United States; the other four were distinguished experts on the modern history, culture, and societies of the Islamic world. Each of the questions they were asked to discuss was political, and all of the questions touched on the threat of Islam to American interests. Here and there the experts would attempt to discuss the Islamic world as if it had different pasts, different political processes, different kinds of Muslims. But these attempts were overridden by the force of questions like the following: "If we are so satanic in the eyes of many Moslems at this point, how should we deal with forces, with leaders, with governments that we feel some affinity to? Bazergan shakes Brzezinski's hand and he's gone. Bani-Sadr says he

wants to come to New York and that finishes him. Is there a lesson for us in how we deal with other regimes? Is there a lesson of restraint or what?" The *Times* obviously felt it was going directly to the source: if Muslims were "ruled" by Islam, question Islam face-to-face. The interesting point is that the scholars were trying to subdivide "Islam" into its more important components, whereas the *Times* recomposed these components into powers either "inimical" or "friendly" to United States interests. The net result of the symposium was exasperation, since it was clearly implied in the last set of *Times* questions that persuasion and logic could not work and therefore force might have to be used as a last resort.

Doubts about what "we" were to think about Islam were cleared up when, on the last four days of 1979, the *Times* published a series of four long articles by Flora Lewis, all attempting seriously to deal with Islam in crisis ("Upsurge in Islam," December 28, 29, 30, 31). There are some excellent things in her articles—for example, her success in delineating complexity and diversity—but there are serious weaknesses too, most of them inherent in the way Islam is supposedly viewed nowadays. Not only did Lewis single out Islam in the Middle East (the upsurge in Judaism and Egyptian or Lebanese Christianity, for instance, was scarcely mentioned), but she went on to make statements, particularly in her third article, about the Arabic language (quoting expert opinion that its poetry is "rhetorical and declamatory, not intimate and personal") and the Islamic mind (an inability to employ "step-by-step thinking") that would be considered either racist or nonsensical if used to describe any other language, religion, or ethnic grouping. Too frequently her authorities were Orientalists who have made known their general views: Élie Kedourie, who in late 1979 did a study of the Islamic revolution purporting to show that it was equivalent to Marxism-Leninism,⁵ was quoted as saying that "the disorder of the East is deep and endemic," and Bernard Lewis (not a relative of Flora Lewis) pronounced on "the end of free speculation and

research" in the Islamic world, presumably as a result of Islam's "static" as well as "determinist, occasionalist, and authoritarian" theology. One could not be expected to get a coherent view of Islam after reading Flora Lewis, whose scurrying about in sources and unfamiliarity with the subject give her readers a sense of a scavenger hunt for a subject that was not one to begin with; after all, how could one get hold of several hundred million people whose words "are an expression of wish rather than a description of fact"? (Compare the following in the *Atlanta Constitution*, November 19: "the subtle and elusive nature of the Persian language.") The point about Islam was made anyway, that even if "it" wasn't clear at all, "our" attitudes to it (or the attitudes "we" had every right to ascribe to it) were.

In a perhaps unintentionally revealing interview published in the May 1980 issue of *Esquire*, Flora Lewis described the assumptions and the work stemming from them that resulted in her Islam articles. The patchwork reporting and the helter-skelter manner suggest that the *Times* could get away with it because Islam is Islam and the *Times*, the *Times*. This is what she says (note the informal authority of the remark "nobody knows what the hell is going on in Islam"):

A few months ago, for instance, I was involved in a project that was absolutely staggering in its proportions. New York had just given me this special assignment on the ferment in the Islamic world. They had a meeting in New York, and someone said, "Jesus, nobody knows what the hell's going on in Islam. Let's send Flora." So they called me up, and I went. It was crazy; I wasn't even sure how to use the material I would gather.

I had to make arrangements frantically so I would be sure of seeing people beforehand. I did not have time to go anywhere and sit around for three days.

I started off in Paris and London. Then I went on to Cairo, because that's where the Islamic university is located, and also to Algiers and Tunis. I came back with twenty notebooks and ten pounds of paper and sat down to write.

Of course, all of this does have the advantage that I do learn something. Talk about *formations permanentes* [perpetual studenthood]—*The New York Times* will give you one scholarship after another.


The exception to doing all the reporting myself is when I simply can't make it to a place because of time pressures. On the Islam project, for example, I needed a rather extensive file on the Philippines. It turned out that the Asiatic bureau couldn't spare anyone to do that either—they had their hands full with the Cambodian war and the mess in South Korea and the political crisis in Tokyo—so someone just had to put together a package for me out of New York.

An illuminating comparison can be made between the *Times's* feature coverage of "Islam" and *Le Monde's*. The *Times* had it quickly put together by Flora Lewis; she discusses neither the great theological and moral issues debated all across the Islamic world (how can one talk about Islam today and never once mention the conflict raging between partisans of *ijtihad* (individual interpretation) and partisans of *taqlid* (reliance on the interpretation of authorities) as modes of Koranic interpretation?) nor the history and structure of the various Islamic schools fueling the "upheaval" she tries to document. Instead she relies on random quotations from even more random people, she uses anecdotes to do the work of analysis, and she does not so much as report the actual terms of Islamic life, whether they are doctrinal, metaphysical, or political.

It is useful to compare the elite American newspaper in this regard with the elite French newspaper. Exactly one year before (on December 6, 7, and 8, 1978) *Le Monde* commissioned Maxime Rodinson (an eminent French Marxist Orientalist quoted by Flora Lewis) to study the same phenomenon.⁶ The difference could not be greater. Rodinson completely commands the subject; he knows the languages, he knows the religion, he understands politics. There are no anecdotes, no sensational quotations, no "balance" in relying

on "pro" and "anti" Islamic experts. He tries to suggest what forces in Islamic society and history have cooperated with present political configurations to produce the current crisis. As a result, it is a coherent experience—of imperialism, class conflict, religious dispute, social morality—that emerges in his work, not merely a collection of attitudes displayed for the benefit of suspicious and frightened readers.

II. *The Loss of Iran*

 Anyone saturated with superficial, loose-tongued reporting on Iran might well be prone to turn for relief and genuine insight to PBS's nightly *MacNeil/Lehrer Report*. Like the *New York Times* in the world of print journalism, the *Report* is acknowledged to be an elite program in broadcast journalism. I have found the *MacNeil/Lehrer* programs strangely unsatisfying, as much for their surprisingly restrictive and even conservative format as for the choice of guests and range of discussion. Take the format first. Given an unconventional news story about as unfamiliar a part of the world as Iran, the viewer will immediately be made to feel an intense disparity between the mobs "out there" and the carefully dressed, carefully balanced cast of guests whose uniform qualification is expertise, not necessarily insight or understanding. There is nothing wrong with trying to grasp a situation rationally, as the show sets out to do, but the questions asked of guests make it evident that MacNeil and Lehrer tend to look for support of the prevailing national mood: outrage at the Iranians, ahistorical analyses of what makes the Iranians tick, attempts at making discussion fit either cold-war or

crisis-management molds. An extremely telling indication of this appeared in the two programs (December 28 and January 4) in which the guests were the two sets of American clergymen recently returned from Teheran. In both programs the clergymen spoke of their compassion for Iranian feelings about what it was like to suffer under twenty-five years of the shah's despotic rule. Lehrer was openly skeptical, not to say dubious, about what they were saying. When then Foreign Minister Bani-Sadr and his successor, Sadegh Ghotbzadeh, appeared (November 23 and 29), the line of questioning stayed very close to what had emerged as the United States government position: when will the hostages be released, and never mind concessions or investigative committees to deal with the ex-shah's misdemeanors and crimes. The irony is that Bani-Sadr for the first time did not insist on the ex-shah's return; he proposed a formula that was to be enacted by the United Nations commission that went to Teheran several months later. At the time, reporters MacNeil and Lehrer were typical in ignoring the proposal.

The guest list during the period 1979 from early November to mid-January 1980 was even more significant. Aside from five appearances by Iranians and one each by Richard Falk and Eqbal Ahmad, who are known supporters of Third World and antiwar causes, all the panelists were newspapermen, government officials, academic Middle East experts, individuals connected to corporate or quasi-governmental institutions, or Middle Easterners known for their essentially antagonistic positions on the Iranian revolution. The frequency with which some people appeared left no room for doubt. Menges of the Hudson Institute was on twice, former United States Ambassador to Afghanistan Robert Neumann and L. Dean Brown also twice. The net result was to place everything the Iranians said and did out of moral bounds; this fed our outrage, but did not help us in understanding the news. I was struck by this, and surprised that neither Lehrer nor MacNeil tried to investigate what Bani-Sadr meant, for

example, when he evoked "the oppressed of the world" and suggested that the satisfaction of their claims did not demand the former shah's extradition (i.e., it was not a simple matter of the United States backing down) but required only a gesture of recognition from the United States that the oppressed had legitimate grievances.

Thus in the very conduct of its investigation the *MacNeil/Lehrer Report* seemed to censor itself, prevent itself from straying into wider areas of human experience that antagonists or interlocutors thought were important. The tightly organized ranks of participants sitting around a table dominated by a demanding pair of hosts; the over-all balanced point of view, in which no guest could truly communicate the essentially "foreign" language of distant oppressed peoples who had until now silently endured decades of American impingement on their lives; the questions that always focused on how to deal with a crisis, not on trying to understand the new horizons being opened up everywhere in the nonwhite, non-European world; the almost instinctive resort to received wisdom about geopolitics, sectarian unrest, Islamic revivalism, balance of power: these were the constraints within which MacNeil and Lehrer operated. And for better or for worse, they happen to be the very constraints within which the government itself operates.

In the context created by a journalism afflicted with supercaution and self-imposed conformity on Iran, we can now begin to appreciate the astonishing prescience of I. F. Stone's piece "A Shah Lobby Next?" which he wrote on January 17, 1979, and which was published by the *New York Review of Books* February 22. He spoke there of how the shah could "rally formidable friends," from the Chase Manhattan Bank to the arms industry, the oil trust, the CIA, and "hungry academia." But with the shah "now here in person" tempting possibilities might arise, even though "we should have learned by now, but haven't, to keep out of Iran's domestic politics, and we may get a parallel lesson soon in keeping

Iran's politics out of ours." Why? Because, Stone's uncanny predictions continue: "What if the new Iranian regime makes demands of its own . . . lays claim to the foreign holdings and bank accounts of the Shah and the Pahlevi Foundation? What if it demands the Shah's return for trial on charges of plundering the country? What if it accuses him, as absolute ruler, with absolute responsibility for untold tortures and deaths at the hands of SAVAK?"

I cite Stone not just because he happens to have been right in his predictions but also because he is not, and has never pretended to be, an "expert" on Iran, much less a man known for his pro-Islamic sympathies. Look through his article and you will find no references to the Islamic mentality or Shi'a predilections for martyrdom or any of the other nonsense parading as relevant "information" on Iran. He understands politics; he understands and makes no attempt to lie about what moves men and women to act in this as well as other societies; above all, he does not doubt that even though Iranians are not Europeans or Americans they may have legitimate grievances, ambitions, hopes of their own, which it would be folly for Westerners to ignore. No euphemism, no hyperbole there. If Stone cannot read Farsi, he does not allow himself the compensating luxury of generalizations about "The subtle and elusive nature of the Persian language."

With characteristic hard-headedness Joseph Kraft sketched his view of the matter in "Time for a Show of Power," written for the *Washington Post* on November 11, and it was what he wrote there, far more than all the standard remarks about diplomatic immunity and the sanctity of our embassy, that illuminated aspects of the underlying, perhaps even unconscious rationale for the media's over-all performance. The downfall of the shah, Kraft wrote, was "a calamity for American national interests." Not only did the shah make available regular amounts of oil, he imposed order on the Iranian plateau through "his imperial pretensions." This was good for America: it kept the oil flowing; it kept the region as well as

"submerged nationalists" in line; it kept "us" appearing strong. Kraft went on to recommend "finding occasion for an unmistakable, and preferably surprising, assertion of American power on behalf of the regimes that feel menaced by the Ayatollah," as part of the process of "rebuilding American policy toward Iran." How else might this be done?

[It] might take the form of supporting Iraq in its effort to stir up provincial resistance inside Iran. It might mean giving military assistance to Turkey. . . . To find and exploit such opportunities, there is required a crucial internal change in Washington. The United States needs a capacity to do something besides sending Marines and bombing. It has to rebuild a capacity self-destructed only a few years ago—a capacity for covert intervention.

What is clear in Kraft's piece is his unwillingness to accept the Iranian revolution as having happened in the first place. Therefore it and everything connected to it—the Ayatollah, Islam, the Iranian people—had to be "revised" as the aberrant event he wished his readers to believe it was. In other words, Kraft was projecting his personal version of reality onto a fairly complex Iranian as well as American reality, thereby substituting that version for reality. And Kraft's version had the additional didactic merit of being entirely devoid of morality: it was about power, American power to have the world on "our" terms, as though the result of what were in fact twenty-five years of intervention in Iran had taught us nothing. If in the process he found himself denying that other people have the right to produce a change in their own form of government, denying even that a change had definitively taken place, that did not much matter. He wanted America to know (and be known by) the world because of its power, its needs, its vision. Anything else was an outrage.

The trouble with that view is that even from a pragmatic and totally selfish standpoint, it is both coarse and blind. At the very moment that Kraft and others like him were attacking the Iranian revolution and lamenting the loss of the shah, the

situation in Iran was highly volatile and uncertain. The masses who had brought down the shah's regime were in the forefront of a political coalition with Ayatollah Khomeini at its head. He alone had the authority and the spiritual as well as political legitimacy to command the country's attention; yet immediately beneath the surface he dominated, a struggle was going on between several factions, among them of course the clergy (whose following was organized into the Islamic Republican Party), the middle-of-the-road liberals (with Bazergan in their forefront), a broad grouping of liberal to left Islamic parties and personalities (out of which Bani-Sadr emerged), and the non-Islamic left, itself made up of many different parties and groupings. For over a year after the revolution—that is, from February 1979 until at least March or April 1980—the struggle for power between these different factions was being waged; at moments Bani-Sadr seemed to triumph, then at others—principally during the late winter and early spring of 1980—the clergy (with Ayatollah Mohammed Beheshti at their head) dominated. *Very little of this struggle was reported in the United States while it was taking place.* So strong was the ideological commitment to the idea of a monolithic and unchanging Islam that no note was taken of the political processes *within* this particular Islamic country. Then, when the conservative Islamic grouping triumphed as the result of a struggle, the earlier descriptions of Islam seemed to have been right after all. And once the helicopter rescue failed, and after the Carter administration decided to put Iran on the back burner for a while (and, in a sense, when it was too late), the press dutifully started reporting the power struggles between Beheshti and Bani-Sadr. In typical fashion Bani-Sadr was portrayed as the kind of person we *could* have dealt with had Beheshti not been there, whereas in fact when Bani-Sadr was in the ascendancy in late 1979, he was either ignored or disdained.

Power, of course, is a complex, not always visible, very protean thing, unless one thinks only in military terms. Yet

there are situations where, as Kraft quite accurately observed, it cannot be seen or understood easily, nor can it be employed directly (a raid, CIA subversion, a punitive strike of some sort), but only indirectly ("America held hostage" presented and re-presented by an information apparatus with seemingly limitless resources). The media were interested in asserting *their* direct power for a very long time. I do not think it an exaggeration to say that the feeling of "national impotence" of which Kraft spoke was the temporary eclipse of one kind of American power by another: the military's by the media's. After the occupation of the embassy, the military was stymied by a force which seemed outside the range of direct American power (a fact amply demonstrated by the abortive rescue attempt in late April 1980).

This same force, however, remained vulnerable to the limits placed on it by the rich symbolizing powers of the media. However much the Iranian individual had gained his or her freedom from the shah and the United States, he or she still appeared on American television screens as part of a large anonymous mob, deindividualized, dehumanized, ruled again as a result. Yet whether they did so consciously or not, the news media were in fact using their powers of representation to accomplish a purpose, similar to that intended by the United States government in the past: namely, the extension of an American presence, or what to Iranians amounted to the same thing, negation of the Iranian revolution. This did not mean principally the presentation of news, nor the analysis of or reflection upon an important new juncture in American foreign relations. With very few exceptions, the media's purpose seemed to be to wage a kind of war against Iran.

A remarkable set of investigative reports by Walter Pincus and Dan Morgan of the *Washington Post* in December, January, February, and March 1980 were exceptions. They put overwhelming evidence before the reader of the former shah's lucrative deals with United States arms firms, of his holdings in the Pahlavi Foundation, of his manipulation and repression

of his people (some of which had been detailed in Robert Graham's book *Iran: The Illusion of Power*). Yet such articles, as well as Bernard Nossiter's *New York Times* article on November 26, 1979, comparing Khomeini with the shah, were few in comparison to the prevailing, repeatedly proclaimed mood of outrage conveyed by the media. Strangely, no one thought to view United States policy in Iran against the background of so-called capitulations in practice for a century; this policy, by which various powers beginning with England were given extraterritorial economic, diplomatic, and juridical privileges in Iran (Khomeini was able to say in 1964, "If the Shah should run over an American dog, he would be called to account, but if an American cook should run over the Shah . . . no one has any claim against him"⁷), was never mentioned in the media. Yet it clearly could have been used to interpret the peculiar intensity of Iranian feelings against all "foreign devils," particularly foreign diplomats, not just the United States. This might have muted the sanctimonious protestations of many commentators who saw America as both egregiously wronged by Iran and innocent of anything but excessive benevolence towards Iranians.

Not surprisingly, therefore, one did not learn very much from what was published during the first three months of the crisis. The media provided *insistence*, not analysis or in-depth coverage of the story's rich complexities. I think Americans would say that the media gave ample evidence of their power to be there, in Teheran, and of their knack for prodding events into assimilable if rudimentary shape. But there was no help to be had in analyzing the complicated politics of what was taking place, and surely no one came away with a sense that the media were recording the complex and sometimes bewildering processes of history. But one could learn something about how the media went about their work.

Aside from the unrelenting depictions of the confrontational experience I alluded to, there were the expense and the sheer volume of Iran news. For the period of ten weeks during

which I monitored eight daily newspapers, the three networks, *Time*, *Newsweek*, and PBS, it seemed that every leading newspaper in the country prominently carried the Iranian events, plus "backgrounders" and smaller features associated with it. John Kifner of the *New York Times* wrote on December 15, 1979, that there was a corps of no less than three hundred Western reporters (most if not all of whom needed interpreters) on the ground in Teheran, and Col Allen on December 16, 1979, reported for *The Australian* that between them the three major American networks were spending a million dollars a day in Teheran. In addition to its bureau chief, CBS, according to Allen, "Had a team of 23 journalists, a cameraman, audio man and film and technical experts aided by 12 Iranian interpreters, car driver and guide." A \$6,000-a-month hotel suite served as operations center, and thirty-five additional rooms at \$70 a day each housed journalists, drivers, and interpreters; add to that the cost of private planes, Telex machines, cars, and phones, as well as a telecommunications satellite used four hours a day at \$100 a minute, and the costs rise very steeply.

Returning to the United States after a trip abroad, Vermont Royster commented in the *Wall Street Journal* on December 19, 1979, that the accumulated pile of newspapers and television programs he started going through testified to

how little I learned about the Iranian crisis I didn't already know, despite the voluminous coverage given it. Once home I was startled to find myself inundated in a daily tidal wave of television, radio and newspaper stories about Iran. The papers carried long stories under huge headlines, while TV devoted most of the evenings news to the topic and then ran late-evening specials almost every night.

And from that arose another heretical thought, that the news media were engaged in overkill.

This may seem a strange reaction about a story of such obvious importance. . . . But the volume of words to tell a story

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don't necessarily equate with the information imparted. The truth is that in much of that wordage there was no real news at all.

Day 28 . . . day 35 . . . day 40. Most days there was hardly anything different to report from the day before.

Perhaps Royster was also reacting not so much to the sameness of the news as to the unsatisfactorily narrow and quickly exhausted range of assumptions used in looking for the news. How long is it possible to rely on experts or reporters who are understandably concerned about the hostages, incensed at the impropriety of the thing, perhaps also angry at Islam, and still hope to get fresh information, news, analysis? If one were to read the *Chicago Tribune* on November 18—a longish piece by James Yuenger citing experts who say that “this is not something up for rational discussion” or that Iranians “hunger for martyrdom” and have “a tendency to look for scapegoats”—and then either *Time* or *Newsweek* the week after, and the several features in the *New York Times* the week after that, one would keep coming up against the information that Iranians are Shi'ites who long for martyrdom, led by a nonrational Khomeini, hating America, determined to destroy the satanic spies, unwilling to compromise, and so forth. Were there no events taking place in Iran before the embassy takeover that might illuminate things? Was there no Iranian history or society to write and speak about that wasn't translatable into the anthropomorphisms of a crazy Iran gratuitously taunting good-guy America? Above all, was the press simply interested in diffusing news seemingly in keeping with a United States government policy to keep America “united” behind the unconditional demand for the hostages' release, a demand—shrewdly assessed by Roger Fisher of Harvard on the *Today Show* December 3—itself subordinate to the real priority, which wasn't their release but “keeping America strong”?

Paradoxically, government and media sometimes appeared to be antagonists. Hence the stir caused by the gov-

ernment's attack on NBC for using the Gallegos interview.⁸ Or the frequent refrain coming from quarters speaking either for or like the government that, as George Ball put it during the *MacNeil/Lehrer Report* of December 12, “the greatest communications network in the world has been really at the service of the so-called government in Iran.” And related to that theme, there was the constant undermining of testimonials, statements, or declarations broadcast, printed, diffused, or portrayed by the media, either that so-and-so is brainwashed when he speaks, or that X and Y Iranians are propagandizing or fanatical enemies. Reporting for the *Chicago Tribune* on November 22, James Coates said that “hostages held in the United States Embassy in Teheran are undergoing psychological pressures similar to the brainwashing of American POWs during the Korean and Viet Nam wars, administration officials said.” The officials later admitted that “they were concerned about some of the statements the freed hostages have made since their release.” Lois Timnick reported for the *Los Angeles Times* on November 26 that according to one expert, “the world can expect to see and hear taped interviews with individual hostages in which they ‘confess’ to all sorts of misdeeds and make statements that are harmful both to themselves and to the United States.”

Still another case of the same collegial quarrel was the attack on Senator Kennedy (e.g., “Teddy is the toast of Teheran,” *New York Post*, December 5) for proposing an alternative view that did not replicate views held by the government and the media. Or there was the unmerciful drubbing given Representative George Hansen, whose entire past was reproduced in order to give seriousness to the charges made against him by Tip O'Neill.

I am not saying that there was direct collusion between the media and the government, nor am I saying that *everything* reported about Iran was essentially distorted by the ideological hobbles I have been discussing. Nor, certainly, do I believe that there is any way to condone the holding of hos-

tages; even Mansour Farhang, the Iranian ambassador to the United Nations, admitted exactly that on the *MacNeil/Lehrer Report* November 5. No one can doubt, however, that the hostage crisis played a still insufficiently analyzed role in the complex dynamics of Iran's continuing revolution, although it has seemed that the cause of retrogressive elements in Iranian society was helped by the protracted embassy holding. Now that the crisis is coming to a close (largely because the war with Iraq has made the hostages no longer useful to Iran's internal politics), a new situation is beginning to emerge. Even so, what I am saying is that the world we live in is much too complex and much too different now and much too likely to go on producing unconventional situations (however little they may be to the United States' liking as a nation) to be treated as if everything could be translated into affronts to or enhancements of American power. Americans cannot continue to believe that the most important thing about "Islam" is whether it is pro- or anti-American. So xenophobically reductive a view of the world would guarantee a continued confrontation between the United States and the rest of an intransigent mankind, a policy of expanding the cold war to include an unacceptably large portion of the globe. I suppose that such a policy could be considered active advocacy of the "Western way of life," but I believe that an equally good case could be made that the Western way of life does not necessarily involve provoking hostility and confrontation as a means for clarifying our own sense of our place in the world.

My own assumptions about what I suggest is a newly emerging worldwide political situation (of which Iran is a major harbinger) need to be put forward very briefly at this point. Whereas a great many people argue that American power is declining, I would say instead that more of the world than before is politically aware and therefore less likely to be content with the status either of a satellite colony or of an unthinking ally. Today's Iran and Western Europe respectively illustrate what I mean. Moreover, there is no reason to

believe that the people of Afghanistan wanted to be invaded by the Soviet Union any more than the Iranians were happy about United States support for the ex-shah. I think it is both wrong and foolish to regard "Islam" as a block, just as I think it is bad political judgment to treat "America" as if it were an injured person rather than a complex system. Therefore I believe that we need to know more about the world, not less; we should consequently expect higher standards of reporting, more sophistication of information, more sensitive and accurate accounts of what is taking place than we are now getting. But this certainly means getting well beyond what is commonly available to newsmen and newswomen who work in a society (a) whose awareness of the non-Western world is essentially determined either by crisis or by unconditional ethnocentrism, (b) whose ability to build an elaborate structure of information for itself out of quickly gathered clichés and narrowly defined self-interest is remarkable, and (c) whose history of interaction with the highly diverse Islamic peoples has been shaped recently only by oil and by rulers (like the ex-shah) whose alliance with the United States brings the limited, badly underexamined rewards of "modernization" and anticommunism.

Getting beyond all this will be difficult indeed. Consider that the correspondents of most of the major American newspapers and television networks struggle heroically to fulfill an unremitting duty to bring back a story. Yet usually they do not know the language of the area they cover, they have no background in the area, they are removed after a short tour of duty even after beginning to make important contributions. No matter how gifted the individual, he or she cannot hope to report places as complex as Iran or Turkey or Egypt without some training and a lengthy term of residence in the place. Consider, for instance, that James Markham, the capable and gifted man who reported the Lebanese civil war for the *Times* in 1975-1976, had just come from Vietnam, and after only a year in the Near East was sent to Spain; that during John

Kifner's absence in Teheran the entire Levant was reported intermittently for the *Times* by Henry Tanner, a man stationed in Rome, or by Nicholas Gage, while Marvine Howe, the former Beirut correspondent (who was also supposed to cover Jordan, Syria, Iraq, and the Gulf), spent one year in Beirut right after her stint in Portugal and a year later, in the autumn of 1979, was moved to Ankara. If this sort of thing is compared with the practice in some European publications, the self-inflicted dangers it incurs stand out starkly: *Le Monde* has Eric Rouleau, who is fluent in Arabic and has reported the region for almost a quarter of a century; the *Manchester Guardian* has David Hirst, also fluent in the languages, also a veteran of at least fifteen years experience. (In most other ways, however, European foreign affairs journalism is no less weak than its American counterpart.) The odds against adequate reporting by the network reporter, who is likely to be even more itinerant than the print journalist, makes the latter seem like an encyclopedia of knowledge and serenity in comparison.

I suspect that the extreme unevenness of reporting about the East and "Islam" that we find routinely in the American media would not as readily be tolerated in reporting on Western Europe, which is not to say that the problems of Western European coverage have been resolved. In any event, I find it difficult to understand why radio, television, and newspaper executives all seem to agree that the fresh-eyed school of reporting is more to be trusted than a record of experience in the region being reported. During the Iran crisis, one could watch competent network reporters like Morton Dean, John Cochran, and George Lewis becoming "experts" before our very eyes, not because they knew more, but simply because it was supposed that if you stay in a spot for a brief length of time you will get to know it adequately. In actuality, what one watched was the reporter relying more and more uncritically on the need to make a report—for example, the nightly NBC discussion between John Chancellor in New York and Lewis

and Cochran in Teheran—and less and less on analysis or actual news-gathering. Accuracy—never a virtue of the media—was usually sacrificed to getting a report out, whether or not there really was anything new to report.

But other pressures play important roles also. Print journalists are aware that the television network correspondents can produce literally eye-catching stories every night; they then think too in terms of what will draw consumers, which in the end has little to do with actual coverage, accuracy, or real significance. The competition between print and images has made for overemphasis on what is bizarre in Shi'a Islam and for psychological profiles of Khomeini, although the same competition accounts for neglect in coverage of other figures and forces at work in Iran. Still more important—and distorting—is the fact that the media have been used as diplomatic conduits, an aspect of "the Iran story" noted thoughtfully by *Broadcasting* magazine on December 24, 1979. The Iranians as well as the United States government were perfectly aware that statements made on television were aimed not only at people who wanted the news but also at governments, at partisans of one faction or another, at new or emerging political constituencies. No one has studied the effect of this on "deciding what's news," but I believe that a general awareness of it drove United States reporters to think restrictively and reductively in us-versus-them dichotomies. Yet this literalization of group feeling made the reporters' incapacities and inaccuracies more rather than less apparent.

III. Unexamined and Hidden Assumptions

☾ Inaccuracy is bad enough, but reporting that is based on assumptions about the status quo are worse in my opinion. In the January–February 1979 issue of the *Columbia Journalism Review* an article appeared about how the United States media reported the shah's regime. The authors of that extraordinarily perceptive piece showed convincingly that "the press, in sum, has by and large accepted the shah's implicit argument that the best his people can muster in the way of ideological resources are religious fanaticism and communism."⁹ *Science* magazine in its December 14, 1979 issue also commented on the failure of understanding, but placed the blame rather more squarely on the entire defense and intelligence community; this view was given its most thoughtful and thorough exposition in an article by Herman Nickel in *Fortune's* March 12, 1979 issue. Nickel's wise conclusion, however, has generally gone unheeded:

The roots of the American failure [in Iran] run deeper than tactical lapses, deeper into the past.

Only a fair-minded and patient tracing of these roots can

produce an inquiry of any serious uses to the future. It cannot be said too often that such an exercise in self-examination by the US must not traffic in emotional and divisive recrimination over "Who lost China?" so poisonous to the recent politics of the 1940's and 1950's. The recent history of US policies toward Iran is not a tale conspicuous for wise prophets, long ignored, now entitled to raise their voices and point their fingers. Rather, the responsibility for failure seems widely enough shared to encourage some general sense of humility. The grave exaggeration of the personal power of the Shah to govern Iran was a misjudgment embraced with equal confidence by both Republican and Democratic Administrations. And the voices of doubt or dissent were no more audible in the halls of Congress than in the councils of the White House.

Debates weighing constructive political questions, rather than brandishing ad hominem accusations, probably must start with renewed awareness that other nations are not, after all, ours to "lose." If there is one lesson Americans should have learned from the Vietnam tragedy, it is that we do not *possess* the ability to decree the course of events in ancient countries deeply affected by their own histories, cultures, and religions. If the role of Buddhism in Southeast Asia often seemed politically confounding, the role of Islam in Iran has proved even more remarkable and baffling to US policymakers.

Almost a year later the proprietary, recriminatory attitudes were still prevalent, with the added irony that the media as a whole seemed to find it difficult to concede that the revolution itself had actually taken place definitively. For one, most journalists still tended to refer to Mohammed Reza as "the shah," not "the ex-shah." For another, until the middle of 1980 (when it seemed clear that the right wing of the revolution had gained the ascendancy), there was a substantially higher proportion of stories reporting atrocities and executions over those reporting the country's extremely fluid, actually quite open political struggle. One would have thought it a

worthwhile effort to report in detail what it means for a country's national existence, after decades of severe oppression, to have a dozen political parties vying for influence and power, relatively free of torture and imprisonment. What does it mean for a nation to have a leader who, although stubborn and in most ways unattractive, has only an unclearly defined official position, who is not too interested in central government, who is clearly venerated, who seems a virtuoso at keeping a dozen factions busy with each other but under his ultimate control, and who speaks with such conviction of *al-mostazafin*—the weakened and oppressed? Few stories made the point during the early days of the hostage crisis that government in Iran was provisional at best, pending the setting up of a new state, or that for most of 1979 there had been much debate in Iran about the constitution and the structure of government, or that there were numerous parties operating fiercely (religious and secular, right-wing and left-wing), or that dozens of newspapers appeared regularly, or that there were actual political issues (not by any means all reducible to sectarian or ethnic or religious factionalism) exercising large numbers of Iranians, or that the conflict between the ayatollahs (Khomeini and Shariat-Madari, among others) concerned political as well as religious interpretations of Islamic principles, or that the future of Iran need not inevitably fall into patterns viewed as desirable or undesirable by middle-class reporters for American newspapers.

The hardest thing to understand about the editorial and feature-reporting sector of the media is why, almost without exception, it regarded the movement that overthrew the Pahlavi dynasty and brought in different, perhaps more popular groups with such disdain and suspicion. "The New Barbarians are loose in Iran," wrote Hal Gulliver of the *Atlanta Constitution* on November 13, 1979; he spoke not just of the students holding the hostages but of everyone in Iran. Read a long, apparently expert piece by Youssef Ibrahim in the October 14, 1979 issue of the *New York Times Sunday Maga-*

zine, and you will be convinced that the revolution has already failed, that Iran is a smoldering lava-bed of resentment, fear, and dislike of the revolution. The evidence: basically some impressions, quotations from two government ministers, and for the most part discussions with a banker, a lawyer, and an advertising executive.

Not that reporters should not have opinions and should not let their clients know what those opinions are. But it is when opinion is metamorphosed into reality that journalism suddenly becomes self-fulfilling prophecy. If you assume that the Iranian revolution was a bad thing because it employed a dramatically unfamiliar (to Western eyes) idiom of religious as well as political resistance to oppose tyranny, then what you will look for, and invariably find, is irrational frenzy. Consider Ray Moseley in an article entitled "Conformity, Intolerance Grip Revolutionary Iran" in the November 25 *Chicago Tribune*:

People who consider dying to be an honor are, by definition, fanatics. Vengeful blood lust and yearning for martyrdom seem especially pronounced among the Shia Moslems of Iran. This is what impelled thousands of citizens to stand unarmed and defiant against troops with automatic weapons during the revolution.

Each of these sentences contains highly debatable suppositions posing as truth, but they seem allowable generally because an Islamic revolution is in question. Most Americans do not consider Patrick Henry a fanatic because he said "give me liberty or give me death." A desire to kill French citizens who collaborated with Nazis (many thousands were killed in a matter of days) does not mean that the French could be characterized in so general a way. And what about the very common admiration for people whose moral courage faces down armed troops?

Moseley's attack on Iran was supported by a truly cosmic editorial in his paper the same day accusing Khomeini of nothing less than "a holy war on the world." The *jihad* (holy war)

motif was also given an extraordinary run by the *Los Angeles Times* in an article by Edmund Bosworth on December 12. Leaving aside the fact that according to Fazlur Rahman, "among the later Muslim legal schools . . . it is only the fanatic Kharijites who have declared *jihad* to be one of the 'pillars of the Faith,'"¹⁰ Bosworth goes on indiscriminately to adduce a great deal of historical "evidence" to support the theory that *all* political activity for a period of about twelve hundred years in an area that includes Turkey, Iran, Sudan, Ethiopia, Spain, and India can be understood as emanating from the Muslim call for a *jihad*.

If aggressive hyperbole is one journalistic mode commonly used to describe Iran, the other is misapplied euphemism, usually stemming from ignorance but often deriving from a barely concealed ideological hostility. Its most prevalent form is the device of displacing actuality with a plausible "explanation" of the reporter's own. The one subject newspapers and television programs had looked into only superficially for the first three months of the embassy takeover was the previous Iranian regime: for a remarkably long time it was not popular to take seriously current Iranian grievances against both the deposed monarch and a longstanding United States policy to support him without reservation. Somehow, too, the violation of Iranian sovereignty that occurred in August 1953, when (as Kermit Roosevelt details in his recent and precipitately withdrawn book, *Countercoup*) the CIA in conjunction with the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company overthrew Mohammed Mossadegh,¹¹ merited little investigation, the assumption being that the United States as a great power is entitled to change governments and forgive tyranny when it is inflicted on illiterate nonwhites at our discretion. George E. Cross, a practicing psychiatrist, speculated in a *New York Times* op-ed article on January 11, 1980, that by admitting the former shah to New York the United States in effect pardoned him, an act "devoid of moral principle," just as Gerald Ford's grandiose pardon of Richard Nixon showed "a damaged capacity to form judg-

ments within a moral framework, a loss of empathy with moral outrage in others."

Observations like that were few and far between. Most feature writers and editorialists contented themselves with euphemisms. There seemed to be agreement that the Iranians had committed an act of war against the United States Embassy, although virtually no one also thought that what the United States did to Iran by overthrowing Mossadegh in 1953 was an act of war. Ernest Conine, editorializing for the *Los Angeles Times* on December 10, 1979, was fairly typical:

News accounts seem to bear out the contention by Middle East scholars that what we are really seeing is a widespread revolt against the unsettling influences that have accompanied the Western-style modernization of recent years.

The Shah is hated not just because his police tortured people but also because he took away government subsidies from Moslem holy men, and presided over an industrial revolution that uprooted Iranians from their traditional life styles in the countryside.

"Satan America" is elected as the chief villain not just in Iran but elsewhere, because for 25 years the United States has been the most visible power in the area, and is therefore a handy symbol of outside forces that have brought unwelcome changes.

Much in this argument is weighted against the Iranians through unspoken assumptions, so it needs to be read carefully. Conine first of all implies that the "unsettling influences" of "Western-style modernization" are the result of trying in good faith to bring Iran and Islam out of the past into the present; in other words, Islam and Iran are backward, the West is advanced, and no wonder that backward people are going to have a hard time keeping up. These are eminently contestable value judgments and derive, as I pointed out in Chapter One, from the ideology of modernization. Moreover, Conine assumes, without any warrant except ethnocentric bias, that Iranians were less troubled by torture than by the insult to their "holy men," a phrase used intentionally to sug-

gest primitive people with their witch doctors. In addition, he suggests that Iranians may not have the same feelings "we" do. His final point develops the others by association, laying the blame on retrograde Iranians for not appreciating well-intentioned American and Pahlavi efforts to get Iran going; thus not only are "we" exonerated, but Iranians as a people are subtly indicted for not knowing the value of our brand of modernity, which is why the ex-shah was a noble figure after all.

Little mention was made of the fact, which is neither esoteric nor hard to come by, that vast profits were reaped by American corporations in the area (it should not have been difficult to connect 200 percent oil-company profit increases during the past years with the wealth of the Pahlavi family) and that most Iranians, like the many millions of Arabs who do not directly profit from oil, see American-connected wealth as a burden of sorts. If it was bruited about that the shah occasionally resorted to a little torture—well, said the *Washington Post* on December 16, "it can be argued that it was entirely in the tradition of Iranian history." This would seem to imply that since Iranians have always been tortured, any attempt of theirs to change this foreordained fate is a betrayal of their own history, to say nothing of their own nature.

This irrefutably logical position turned up in a Don A. Schanche story for the *Los Angeles Times*, December 5, 1979, where it was argued that because the new constitution was "one of the most bizarre political documents of modern times" and because it did not happen to resemble closely the United States Constitution (no checks and balances!), Khomeini's ascendancy was at least as bad as the ex-shah's. That in theory at least there would be "provisions for the popular elections of president and parliament and an organized judicial system" was dismissed by Schanche as "the trappings of democracy." He simply omitted to mention what Eric Rouleau analyzed in detail in *Le Monde* on December 2-3, 1979: the very busy, competitive debate about the constitution, disagreements as to

Khomeini's exact role, and so forth. In other words, Schanche seemed more interested in passing off his editorializing as the factual truth about the Iranian Constitution, despite what was actually taking place before his eyes. It was only a matter of coincidence and the result of a tough fight, disappointing in its outcome to many Iranian (and non-Iranian) supporters of the revolution, that the new order in Iran by mid-1980 seemed to be so unpromising. But then surely the emergence in the United States of a Republican candidate of the far right was a no less unhappy coincidence!

With the noteworthy exception of Andrew Young, no high public figure in the United States had anything to say in 1979 about what—to observers like the three ministers who held Christmas services in the embassy or the other groups of clergymen who were in Teheran in late December (both groups appeared on the *MacNeil/Lehrer Report* December 28 and January 4)—the previous regime meant to the Iranians as they took action against the United States. And collaborating in this silence, the press treated the ex-shah exclusively as a charity case for at least twenty days after he was admitted to the United States. Stripped of his political past, he appeared to be somehow unconnected to what was happening at the embassy in Iran. A few journalists, Don Oberdorfer of the *Washington Post* chief among them, tried to reconstruct the devious steps by which David Rockefeller, Henry Kissinger, and John McCloy pressured the United States government into bringing the ex-shah here. But these facts, as well as the ex-shah's longstanding association with the Chase Manhattan Bank—which would have helped to explain Iranian animosities—were not connected causally to the embassy takeover. Instead we were given numerous euphemistic explanations of the hostage crisis as the result of Khomeini's manipulation, his need for distracting the populace, economic difficulties at home, and the like (see the *Los Angeles Times* of November 25 and 27, December 7 and 11; also the *Washington Post* of November 15).

I am convinced finally that it is not too cynical to say of

the over-all United States government position on Iran (as symbolized by President Carter's refusal to discuss the country's past dealings with Iran, which he called "ancient history") that it was a useful device for turning the media's general animosity towards the Iranians, Islam, and generally speaking the non-Western world into political capital during an election year. The president thus appeared to be keeping America strong against base foreign attacks; and this, conversely, was Khomeini's position in Iran. On occasion Carter's refusal to use force earned him the scorn of William Safire and of Joseph Kraft, but on the whole it seems to have assured the public that in comparison with the Islamic "terrorists," as they came to be called, he was upholding Western standards of civilized behavior. Another effect of the crisis was that rulers like President Sadat (whose remark that Khomeini was a lunatic and a disgrace to Islam was repeated *ad nauseam*) were made to seem the desirable Islamic norm. The same was true of the Saudi royal family, although what went unreported in the meantime was a considerable amount of disturbing information and, in the case of Iran, a considerable prolongation of the crisis.

Take Sadat and the Saudis first. Since the Camp David agreements of 1978 there has been a consensus that Sadat is our friend in the region; along with Menachem Begin he has openly proclaimed his willingness to become a regional policeman, give the United States bases on his territory, and so forth. As a consequence, most of what is reported out of Egypt by the media effectively makes his point of view on matters Egyptian, Arab, and regional seem like the correct one. Egypt and the Arab world are now reported with a view to confirming Sadat's pre-eminence. Very little in comparison appears about opposition to him, and it is assumed that he is the political norm as well as the main source of news. Exactly the same thing happened during the Pahlavi regime, of course, when, with the exception of a singularly prophetic article by Berkeley scholar Hamid Algar,¹² no one paid the slightest

attention to the potential of the shah's religious and political opposition. A great many of the United States' political, military, strategic and economic investments are now made through Sadat, and through Sadat's perspective on things. In part this is due to the media's ignorance, their preference for spectacular "personalities," the almost total absence of investigative reporting in deference to the ideological consensus now operating in Egypt and the Middle East.

There are other reasons too. One is the Middle East's sensitive *domestic* aspects. It is no accident, for example, that after Watergate, various revelations about the CIA, the Freedom of Information Act, there have been no major discoveries about United States involvement in the Middle East. This is obvious as concerns Iran, not simply because so many Americans were on the take there but also because of Israel's extremely close involvement with the United States there under the shah's regime. SAVAK was set up with the direct help of the Mosad, and as in many other cases, the CIA and the FBI cooperated willingly with the Israeli secret services.¹³ A series of revealing articles in the Israeli press in 1979 and early 1980 were written by Uri Lubrani and others who were charged with maintaining Israeli-Iranian cooperation before the revolution (see *Davar*, March 20, 1980, and *Ha'aretz*, January 10, 1979); none of this appeared in the American press, probably because it might appear embarrassing to Israel's image as democratic and freedom-loving. At the very moment that the entire United States establishment was up in arms against any talk of extraditing the ex-shah to Iran, a poor Palestinian youth, Ziad Abu Ain, was undergoing the prolonged agony of extradition proceedings (plus the denial of bail and of a habeas corpus writ) with the active collaboration of the State Department, just because (and only because) the Israeli government had claimed—with a third-party confession extracted from and later recanted by another Palestinian in an Israeli jail in Hebrew, a language he did not know—that he was a terrorist, responsible for a bomb incident two years


before. Very little of this caught the media's attention except for an important article by the *New Statesman's* Claudia Wright, "Toying with Extradition," *Inquiry*, January 7 and 21, 1980.

In addition, widespread concern with the stability of places like Saudi Arabia and Kuwait has produced no news reporting commensurate with that concern, except for the constrained, and highly selective, criticism of Saudi Arabia's vulnerability that I described in Chapter One. Of the major networks and newspapers, only CBS's Ed Bradley noted, on November 24, 1979, that all information about the mosque takeover in Mecca came from the government; no other news was permitted, but the *Christian Science Monitor's* Helena Cobban reported from Beirut on November 30 that the mosque's seizure had a very definite *political* meaning; that far from being simply Islamic fanatics the attackers were part of a political network having a secular as well as an Islamic program, pointedly directed at the monopoly on power and money held by the Saudi royal family. A few weeks later her source, a Saudi Arabian resident in Beirut, disappeared; Saudi intelligence is believed to have been responsible.

Following the invasion of Afghanistan, we are probably going to have an even more dramatic cleavage separating good Muslims from bad, more news hailing the achievements of good Muslims like Sadat, Zia al-Haqq, and the Afghan Muslim insurgents, more equating of good Islam with anti-communism and, if possible, with modernization. Few people, however, equate Afghanistan's resistance to Soviet occupation with Palestinian resistance to Israeli occupation, a point made by King Hussein of Jordan when he appeared on *Meet the Press* June 22, 1980. In the case of Saudi Arabia, the dangers of massive United States investment have only been paid attention to (not surprisingly) by American supporters of Israel, who feel that American patronage ought not to be deflected from Israel to the Arabs. A case in point is Peter Lubin's December 22, 1979 *New Republic* article, "What We

Don't Know About Saudi Arabia." He makes a plausible if overstated case for dismissing much of what is written or taught in universities about the Gulf oil states either as propaganda for ruling houses or as ignorance. Nevertheless, he is wholly unable to extend his criticisms to what is written about Israel or to the not very subtle pro-Israeli bias found in many Middle Eastern studies programs in various universities. Likewise, in rightly insisting that journalists ought to be more demanding in what passes for information about our oil-rich allies, Lubin does not also say, as he should, that there is a notorious absence of rigor and fairness in writing about Israel.

IV. Another Country

 All of what I have been saying about media treatment of Islam and Iran during the first, most intense and anguished months of the hostage crisis comes down finally to a few main points. The most useful way of illustrating and formulating these points is to check the over-all American version of the Iran story against a European version, Eric Rouleau's series of daily articles in *Le Monde*, which ran from the first week of the crisis through the end of December; later, after most American reporters were asked to leave Iran in January, the *Times* carried Rouleau's reports for a few days. Of course, it is important to keep in mind that Rouleau is not an American, that no French hostages were being held, that Iran has never been in the French sphere of influence, and that aside from what Rouleau himself produces, the French media are not particularly better in foreign policy reporting than their American counterparts. It is also important to say again that the prodigious amount of media coverage allowed a certain number of extremely valuable, generally (but not always) anticonsensus items to appear. Op-ed pieces in the *Los Angeles Times* and the *Boston Globe*, imaginative articles on

alternatives to force and attempts to take Iranian realities seriously (e.g., Richard Falk in the *Atlanta Constitution* December 9, Roger Fisher in *Newsweek* January 14), excellent background reporting on the shah's admission to this country, good political analysis intermittently and well-narrated news stories (Doyle McManus in the *Los Angeles Times*, Kifner in the *New York Times*): these were some of the high spots more or less available to any reader during the first few weeks of the hostage crisis who was looking for something beyond the narrowly patriotic line generally hewed to most of the time. One should also mention two powerful articles on the new jingoism of Americans wearing "Iran Sucks" and "Nuke Iran" buttons that appeared in *Inquiry* magazine (December 24 and January 7-21), or the very timely information contained in Fred J. Cook's piece for *The Nation* December 22, about how a congressional investigation into Iranian kickbacks that began in 1965 was mysteriously dropped and has just as mysteriously been kept from restarting now when it is of urgent relevance.

But all in all, television, the daily press, and the weekly news magazines reported Iran with nowhere near the insight and impressive understanding of what was taking place there that is displayed in Rouleau's sequence for *Le Monde* during the same period. If I were to put matters very strongly, I would have to say that what he wrote made Iran seem like a different country from the one represented by the American media. Rouleau never lost sight of the fact that Iran was still undergoing massive revolutionary change, and that being without a government it was consequently in the process of creating a completely new set of political institutions, processes, and actualities. Therefore the United States Embassy crisis had to be viewed within that often confusing, always complicated process, not isolated from it. He never used Islam to explain events or personalities; he seems to have viewed his reporter's mandate as comprising the analysis of politics, societies, and histories—complex enough as they are—without

resorting to ideological generalizations and mystifying rhetoric, even if, as later happened, things did not work out as had been hoped, nor in a way one was able to understand. No United States reporter spent any time to speak of reporting the extended debate in Iran over the constitutional referendum; there have been few analyses of the various parties, scarcely a reference to the important ideological struggles separating Beheshti, Bazergan, Bani-Sadr, and Ghotbzadeh, no reporting of the various tactics of struggle employed in Iran, no detailed itemizing (at least until mid-1980) of the numerous political personalities, ideas, and institutions vying for power and attention; no American journalist has even suggested that Iran's political life outside the question whether the hostages were going to be released, or whether someone was pro- or anti-American, had enough intrinsic interest to make it worth some study. Even crucial events like Bani-Sadr's visit to the students in the embassy on December 5, 1979, were ignored, just as no one has so much as mentioned the important role played in the embassy by Hajitolislam Khoieiny, who also happens to have been a candidate for Iran's presidency. These are some of the things treated by Rouleau.

What is more important is that Rouleau seemed to be able to grant in advance that personalities or currents of ideas at work in the crisis might have a potentially serious role. He did not judge things impetuously, did not prejudice something in advance, did not jump to conclusions encouraged by officials, did not leave stories uninvestigated. Representative Hansen's visit emerges as a much more successful undertaking in what Rouleau tells us about it than one could have suspected; there is even substantial evidence given by Rouleau on November 24, 1979, that Hansen's success with the Iranians was deliberately allowed to shrivel up by the White House (and the United States media), just as a possible congressional investigation into United States-Iranian banking procedures (sought by the Iranians, possibly as an exchange for the hostages' release) was snuffed out by the White House.

The struggle through the latter part of 1979 between Bani-Sadr and Ghotbzadeh, the former a determined socialist and anti-imperialist, the latter a conservative on political and economic issues, was described by Rouleau in detail, just as the apparently paradoxical positions they took on the hostage crisis in November and December (Bani-Sadr for defusing it, Ghotbzadeh for escalating it) are chronicled.

What we can also surmise—although no United States journalist has mentioned it—is that the United States preferred dealing with Ghotbzadeh and seemed to encourage Bani-Sadr's removal from the Foreign Ministry (by not taking him seriously, by actively derogating his suggestions, by actually calling him a "kook"). Clearly too, future United States government positions towards Iran (and the decided preference for dealing with conservatives rather than socialists) given the presidential contest handily won by Bani-Sadr are relevant to this period, as is the real reason for Bazergan's fall: certainly not the fact that he was a liberal democrat as the United States media liked to argue, or that he had shaken hands with Brzezinski in Algiers, but that he was inefficient and incompetent in fulfilling his government's stated "Islamic" policies. In one of his more important articles (reproduced in abridged form in the *Manchester Guardian* of December 2, 1979) Rouleau also shows how the United States conducted a sustained economic war against Iran well before the embassy takeover in November; a sinister aspect of this is that the Chase Manhattan Bank continued to play a leading part.

Rouleau's performance can be explained in part because he is a capable man, in part because he has a long history of experience in the Middle East, and in part because, like his American counterparts, he reports with a home constituency very much in mind. *Le Monde*, after all, is not just a French newspaper; it is the French journal of record, and it certainly views itself as representing the world in accordance with a specific conception of what French interests are. It is this conception that partly accounts for the difference between Rou-

leau's Iran and that, for example, of the *New York Times*. The French view is consciously an *alternative* one, neither like a superpower's nor like the other Europeans' view. Moreover, France's (and by extension *Le Monde's*) attitude to the East is an old and experienced one: studiously postcolonialist; concerned less with brute power than with deployment, strategy, and process; focused more on the cultivation of interest rather than on protecting top-heavy investments in isolated regimes; selective, provisional, and nuanced (some would say opportunist) in the choice of what to regard with favor, what to criticize. *Le Monde*, after all, is collectively owned; it is the newspaper of the French bourgeoisie, and so far as the non-French world is concerned, it expresses a politics that has been characterized variously as missionary, pastoral, paternalistic, "socialism with soul," eighteenth-century Enlightenment, and progressively Catholic (Louis Wiznitzer in the *Christian Science Monitor* May 13, 1980; Jane Kramer in the *New Yorker*, June 30, 1980).¹⁴ Be that as it may, what counts is how *Le Monde* attempts, no doubt consciously, to cover the world. Whereas the *New York Times* seems guided principally by crisis and newsworthiness, *Le Monde* tries to record or at least to note most of what takes place abroad. Opinion and fact are not so rigorously separated as they seem (formally, at least) to be in the *Times*: the result, when stories or issues of unusual complexity are concerned, is a far greater flexibility in length, detail, sophistication of reporting. *Le Monde* in its reporting suggests worldliness, the *Times* a grave, rather selective concern. Consider now Rouleau's report on December 2 and 3, 1979.

Rouleau begins by mentioning that for the past three months there had been extraordinary attention given to the discussion of the Constitutional Assembly; hundreds of open meetings were held, many of them televised; the press and partisan journals analyzed the issues, and much time was spent denouncing "antidemocratic" elements in the proposed text. (Very little of this was ever treated in the American

media, by the way.) Next, Rouleau comments on the paradoxical rift between Khomeini and a major part of the country's *political class*, and proceeds then in great detail to show how Khomeini nevertheless managed to work his will immediately by risking direct appeals to the country rather than by temporizing delays. For this, of course, Rouleau must analyze both the constitutional debate (its issues, partisans, and style) and then the actual *forces* involved, keeping clear the rift between power and constitution. In the end Khomeini's "Islamic" partisans are seen to be a heterogeneous group, marshaled and dispersed throughout the polity by Khomeini's remarkable awareness of the "permanent revolution" in course, which only he, a "fastidious legalist" by nature, has been able quite paradoxically to master. After listing the various parties of left and right and quoting a few positions of each, Rouleau locates a number of inconsistencies in the proposed constitution: women are not to be mere objects of sexual pleasure or economic profit, although their rights are not spelled out; syndicates are denounced as Marxist inventions, yet workers' councils are to play an important role in economic life; all citizens have equal rights, but Shi'ism is the religion of the state; and so on. All this leads to the following paragraphs:

It is indispensable for Imam Khomeini without delay to adopt so discussable a constitution. Many people have advised him to postpone the referendum until after the end of the test of strength with the US. A country in revolution, it was said, could very well accommodate itself to a transitional regime for a long period. But the Imam put aside all the advice and objections offered him.

Paradoxically, to those who do not know him well, the patriarch of Qum is a fastidious legalist. He insists on resting his power on juridical bases. The immense popularity he has acquired during the past few weeks has given him direct satisfaction. As for the future, this popularity will be modulated less by the con-

stitution's text than by the balance of political forces to emerge from the "second revolution" now in progress.

Rouleau here makes no effort to judge matters overtly (compare with the superficial *Los Angeles Times* Don Schanche analysis referred to above); he shows instead the disjunctions between appearance and power, between text and readers, between personalities and parties, locating them all exactly within what is essentially a setting in turbulent flux. What he tries to communicate is some sense not only of the process but of the emphases and contests within the process. At most, Rouleau offers a cautious assessment. Never does he resort to patriotic comparisons, nor to ignorant value judgments.

In sum, Rouleau's reporting on Iran for *Le Monde* was political in the best sense of the word. For several months the American media's simply was not; or one could say it was political in the bad sense. What seemed unfamiliar or strange to American (and other Western) reporters was branded "Islamic" and treated with commensurate hostility or derision. Iran as a contemporary society going through extraordinarily important change had little impact on the Western press generally; certainly Iranian history for at least the first year of the revolution was rarely allowed to appear with much integrity. Clichés, caricatures, ignorance, unqualified ethnocentrism, and inaccuracy were inordinately evident, as was an almost total subservience to the government thesis that the only things that mattered were "not giving in to blackmail" and whether or not the hostages were released. Conclusions were given recklessly; a contest in progress was rashly decided by the reporter, with the result that the distinctive continuities and discontinuities of Iranian revolutionary life never emerged. Along with this went a troubling assumption that if the United States had forgiven the former shah and declared him a charity case, it did not matter what Iranians (or Iranian history itself) said. During this period I. F. Stone had the

courage to say forthrightly that the necessity for a United States apology to Iran for "our restoration of the Shah in 1953 . . . is not ancient history for the Iranians, and it may not be ancient history for us either" (*Village Voice*, February 25, 1980).

So poorly and with such antagonism did the press report Islam and Iran during 1979 that it can be suspected that a number of opportunities for resolving the hostage crisis were lost, and perhaps this is why the Iranian government suggested early in 1980 that fewer reporters in Iran might quiet the tension and produce a peaceful resolution. What is most serious about the media's failure, and what does not augur well for the future, is that so far as urgent international issues during a period of acute crisis are concerned, the media do not securely and easily see themselves as performing an independent, truly informational task. There seems to be little awareness that the new era we are entering in the 1980s cannot with impunity be represented in confrontational dichotomies—"us" versus "them," the United States versus the Soviet Union, the West versus Islam, the media always siding with the "good" side—unless we get to the point of believing it inevitable that between them the two superpowers will destroy the world.

And yet, fairness enjoins us to note the changes taking place in the media as the hostage crisis wore on during 1980. There were deeper investigations of the United States' role in Iran: CBS, for example, allocated a major part of two *Sixty Minutes* shows to torture under the shah's regime and to Henry Kissinger's machinations on behalf of the shah. The *New York Times* and the *Washington Post* dutifully reported (on March 7 and March 6 respectively) the government's effort to quash the CBS story, and as was to be expected by then, all the major newspapers did skeptical, disenchanted stories on the late-April rescue effort. More willingly than before, the consensus widened to admit the possibility of different views on Iran. Criticism of the stonewalling government

position increased, as did the sense among citizens (expressed principally in letters to the editor) that we were not being told the full story on Iran. Hostility to and misunderstanding of Islam persisted, however, led (predictably) by conservative journals like the *New Republic*: "The West Defers," argued Élie Kedourie in its June 7, 1980 issue; "Western" power had to be made "visible and respected," he said, otherwise endemic disorder would continue. Periodically, the rigid consensus would make itself felt in dispiriting ways. When Ramsey Clark was interviewed on ABC's *Issues and Answers* (June 8, 1980) upon his return from the "Crimes of America" conference in Teheran, his interviewers did not allow themselves *one single genuinely exploratory question*; everything they asked was profoundly unfriendly, and reflected unhesitating compliance with the administration position that Clark had done a treasonous thing in going.¹⁵

From time to time, for example in John Kifner's intelligent four-part series on the Iranian revolution (*New York Times*, May 29, 30, 31, June 1, 1980) and in Shaul Bhakhash's essay on the Iranian revolution for the *New York Review of Books* (June 26, 1980), one would encounter serious, reflective efforts at coming to grips with what was both a continuing revolution and one whose energies were still not graspable in simple conceptual or strictly empirical terms. Yet I believe there is little doubt that such articles would not have been written if in fact the hostages had been released. The embassy seizure—immoral, illegal, outrageous, politically useful in the short run but wasteful for Iran in the long run—had quite literally forced a crisis of awareness in the United States. From being an almost forgotten, taken-for-granted colony in Asia, Iran had intermittently become an occasion for self-examination on the part of the United States. The Iran story's very persistence, its anxious, unseemly duration, gradually had modified the media's early single-mindedness and narrow focus into something more critical and useful. In short, the embassy seizure instituted *process* where there had only been


static anger; in time this process acquired a history of its own, through which the media—and Americans generally—saw more of themselves than they had hitherto. Whether this was what the militants had intended, or whether this has delayed rather than encouraged the return of normal conditions in Iran, it is too early to tell. Certainly more Americans now understand what a struggle for power means (who has not felt the conflict between Bani-Sadr and Beheshti, with Khomeini lurking mysteriously behind them?), and certainly too, more Americans than before appreciate the futility of trying to impose "our" order on that upheaval, or for that matter, on the battle between Iraq and Iran. Many questions remain unanswered—the circumstances of Beheshti's ascendancy, the modes of struggle between the left and the right, the state of the Iranian economy—and many possible outcomes remain imminent.¹⁶

What has been left unexplored, and what we must try now to broach, is the question underlying the crisis. Why does Iran matter, why does Islam matter, and what sort of knowledge, or coverage, of both do we require? This tripartite question is not an abstract one. It must be seen not only as an integral part of contemporary politics but as a vital part of scholarly pursuits and interpretative activities involving the knowledge of other cultures. But without a demystifying look at the relationship between power and knowledge in this context, we will have dodged the central nub of things. That is what must orient our investigation from this point on.

CHAPTER THREE

KNOWLEDGE AND POWER

I. *The Politics of Interpreting Islam: Orthodox and Antithetical Knowledge*

 Given the present circumstances, with neither "Islam" nor "the West" at peace with each other or with themselves, it may seem exceptionally futile to ask whether, for members of one culture, knowledge of other cultures is really possible. Seek knowledge even as far as China, runs a well-known Islamic precept, and at least since the Greeks it has been a common practice in the West to assert that so long as knowledge pertains to what is human and natural, knowledge must be sought. But the actual result of this search, so far as thinkers in the West are concerned, has usually been believed to be flawed. Even Bacon, whose *Advancement of Learning* is considered to have inaugurated modern Western thought in its most enthusiastic, self-encouraging modes, in effect expresses all sorts of doubts that the various impediments to knowledge (the Idols) can ever really be removed. Bacon's respectful disciple Vico says explicitly that human knowledge is only what human beings have made; external reality, then, is no more than the "modifications of the human mind."¹ The prospects for objective knowledge of what is distant and alien diminish still further after Nietzsche.

As against this skeptical and pessimistic current, students of Islam in the West (and, though I shall not discuss them, students of the West within the Islamic world) have generally tended to be disquietingly optimistic and confident. Early modern Orientalists in Europe seemed to have had little doubt that the study of the Orient, of which the Islamic world was a part, was the royal road to universal knowledge. One of them, the Baron d'Eckstein, wrote in the 1820s that

in the same way that Cuvier and Humboldt discovered the mysteries of [nature's] organization in the earth's entrails, so too would Abel Rémusat, Saint-Martin, Silvestre de Sacy, Bopp, Grimm, and A. W. Schlegel trace and discover in the words of a language all of the internal organization and the primitive bases of human thought.²

A few years later Ernest Renan prefaced his discussion of "Mahomet et les origines de l'islamisme" with remarks on the possibilities opening up before what he called "la science critique." Geologists, historians, and linguists, Renan said, can get at "primitive"—that is, basic and original—natural objects by examining their traces delicately and patiently: Islam is a particularly valuable phenomenon because its birth was comparatively recent and unoriginal. Therefore, he concluded, to study Islam is to study something about which one can acquire both a certain and a scientific knowledge.³

Perhaps because of this happy attitude, the history of Islamic Orientalism is relatively free from skeptical currents and almost entirely free from methodological self-questioning. Most students of Islam in the West have not doubted that despite the limitations of their time and place, a genuinely objective knowledge of Islam, or of some aspect of Islamic life, is achievable. On the other hand, few modern scholars would be as explicitly arrogant as Renan in their views of what Islam is: no professional scholar, for instance, would candidly say like Renan that Islam is knowable because it represents a fundamental case of arrested human develop-

ment. Yet I have not been able to find any contemporary example of the Islamic scholar for whom the enterprise itself was a source of doubt. In part, I think, the guild tradition of Islamic studies, which has been handed down genealogically for about two centuries, has both protected and confirmed individual scholars in what they did, regardless of the methodological perils and innovations challenging scholars in most other humanistic fields.

A representative instance of what I mean is a recent essay, "The State of Middle Eastern Studies," published in the summer 1979 issue of the *American Scholar* by a well-known British scholar of Islam, now resident and working in the United States. Taken as a whole the essay is the product of a mind going over routine things in a lazy, not particularly interesting way. What still strikes the nonspecialist, however, aside from the surprising indifference of the writer to intellectual issues, is the account of Orientalism's supposed cultural pedigree. It deserves quotation at length.

The Renaissance initiated an entirely new phase in the development of Islamic and Middle Eastern studies in the Western world. Perhaps the most important new factor was a kind of intellectual curiosity that is still unique in human history. For until that time, no comparable desire had been felt and no effort made to study and understand alien, still less hostile, civilizations. Many societies have tried to study their predecessors, those to which they feel they owe something, those from which they perceive themselves to be derived. Societies under the domination of an alien and stronger culture have usually been impelled, by force or otherwise, to learn the language and try to understand the ways of those who dominate them. Societies, in a word, have studied their masters, in both senses of the word. . . . But the kind of effort to study remote and alien cultures made by Europe (and later by the overseas daughters of Europe) from Renaissance times onward, *represents something new and totally different*. It is significant that today the peoples of the Middle East show little

interest in each other and even less in the non-Islamic cultures of Asia and Africa. The only serious attempts to study the languages and civilizations of India and China in the universities of the Middle East have been made in Turkey and Israel—the two countries in the region which have consciously chosen a Western way of life.

Even now, non-European civilizations still have the greatest difficulty in understanding intellectual curiosity of this kind. When the first European Egyptologists and other archeologists began to dig in the Middle East, many of the local people found it impossible to believe that foreigners would be willing to spend so much time, effort, and money and undergo so many risks and hardships merely to dig up and decipher the ancient relics of their own forgotten ancestors. They therefore sought other, more rational explanations. For the simple villagers, the archeologists were seekers after buried treasure. For the more sophisticated townspeople, they were spies or other agents of their governments. The fact that some few archeologists did, indeed, render such services to their governments does not make this interpretation of their science any less mistaken, and reveals a sad inability to understand an enterprise that has added new chapters to the history of mankind and new dimensions to the self-awareness of Middle Eastern nations. *This difficulty of perception continues to the present day*, and even affects some academics, who persist in regarding orientalists as either treasure seekers or agents of imperialism.

The gratification of this new intellectual curiosity was greatly helped by the voyages of discovery which brought Europeans to new and strange lands beyond the ocean. These helped break intellectual molds and provided both a stimulus and an opportunity for further study.⁴

Employing little more than unsupported assertion this writing directly contravenes everything that has ever been written either by a fair number of Orientalists themselves, or by historians of Europe from the Renaissance to the present, or by students of the history of interpretation, from Augustine

onwards. Even if we leave aside "the new and totally different" and therefore (by assumption) pure intellectual curiosity—which no one else who has tried to read and interpret a text has ever been fortunate enough to possess—there is much too much to be accepted on faith here. From reading such cultural and colonial historians as Donald Lach or J. H. Parry, one would conclude that European interest in alien cultures was based on actual encounters with those cultures usually as a result of trade, conquest, or accident.⁵ "Interest" derives from need, and need rests on empirically stimulated things working and existing together—appetite, fear, curiosity, and so on—which have always been in play wherever and whenever human beings have lived.

Besides, how does one interpret another culture unless prior circumstances have made that culture available for interpretation in the first place? And these circumstances, so far as the European interest in alien cultures is concerned, have always been commercial, colonial, or military expansion, conquest, empire. Even when Orientalist scholars in nineteenth-century German universities studied Sanskrit, codified the *hadith*, or explained the caliphate, they relied less on the fiction of pure curiosity than on the universities themselves, the libraries, other scholars, the social rewards that made their careers possible. Only Dr. Pangloss or a member of Swift's Academy of Projectors at Lagado in *Gulliver's Travels* would locate the drive for acquiring enormous European empires and the knowledge that went with them principally in "the gratification of new intellectual curiosity." Small wonder, then, that benighted non-European natives have viewed the scholars' "intellectual curiosity" with such suspicion, for when was a Western scholar ever in a non-Western country except by dint, however symbolic and indirect, of Western power over that country?⁶ It is an indication of *this* Orientalist's peculiar ignorance and conceit that he seems unaware of the debate raging within the field of anthropology over the complicity between imperialism and ethnology; even so mandarin

a figure as Lévi-Strauss has expressed misgivings, if not regrets, about imperialism being a constitutive aspect of ethnological field work.

If we dismiss out of hand the protestations about pure curiosity, we will still conclude, I believe, that the whole argument being advanced about Middle East studies is actually a defense of their essentially unflawed capacity—historically and culturally—for telling the truth about distant and alien societies. Later in the same essay this point is further elaborated with reference to the dangers of “politicizing” the field, which, it is alleged, only some scholars and some departments have managed to avoid. Politics here seems associated with narrow partisanship, as if the real scholar is above petty squabbles, being preoccupied only with ideas, eternal values, and high principles; significantly, no examples are given. The interesting point about this entire essay, nevertheless, is how it calls for science and scientific procedures in name only. When it comes to *what* the truth of nonpolitical Middle East studies is, or could be, the author simply says nothing. In other words, the attitudes, the postures, the rhetoric—in fine, the ideology—of scholarship is what counts. Its content is simply not spelled out, and what is worse, there is a deliberate attempt to conceal the connections between scholarship and what we might call worldliness, for the sake of maintaining the fiction of nonpartisan and unpolitical scholarly truth.

This tells us more about the author than it does about the field he purportedly is writing about, an irony that has dogged all modern European or Western attempts to write about non-Western societies. Not that all other scholars have been aware of the difficulty. In 1973 the Middle East Studies Association (MESA), in collaboration with the Ford Foundation, commissioned a team of experts to survey the entire field in order to assess its current state, its needs, its prospects, and its problems.⁷ The result was a large, densely written volume called *The Study of the Middle East: Research and Scholarship in the Humanities and the Social Sciences*, edited by

Leonard Binder and published in 1976. Since the book is a collective work it is inevitably uneven in quality, but one is struck throughout by the general air of crisis and urgency, something totally missing from the essay in the *American Scholar*. For this group of scholars, no less distinguished than their British colleague, Middle East studies is an embattled field: there is not enough attention devoted to it, not enough money, not enough scholars. (Ironically, one member of MESA's Research and Training Committee, which first conceived the study, had written a study of the Middle East studies field a mere handful of years earlier for the United States government, in which he had derogated the need for specialized studies on Islam or the Arabs: this was a field, he said, that was culturally and politically of only secondary importance to the United States.⁸) But underlying all the problems they mention is one which Leonard Binder treats candidly in his introduction.

“The basic motive in the development of area studies in the United States,” runs Binder's very first sentence, “has been political.”⁹ He then proceeds to go through all the organizational and philosophical issues facing the modern specialist in the Middle East, never losing sight of the fact—for it is a fact—that Middle East studies are a part of the society in which, so to speak, they occur. At the end of his survey, after saying quite frankly that even the most basic questions about the field—whether, for instance, one should begin by studying social structures or by studying religion, or whether for a scholar political structures are more or less important than per-capita incomes—are not value-free, and after also saying that even if the “value-orientations of Middle East studies are manifestly more subtle in most cases than the perspectives of government information . . . the problem cannot be avoided,”¹⁰ Binder tries at last to summarize the effects of politics upon the truth of what is produced by Western students of alien cultures.

He grants at once that every scholar has “value orienta-

tions" that come into play when scholarship is produced. But then, he says, "the normative orientations of the disciplines" reduce the distracting effect of personal "ad hoc judgments."¹¹ Binder neither explains how "the disciplines" do things, nor does he specify what it is about "the disciplines" that so easily transforms human judgments into Olympian analyses. As if somehow to deal with these questions, he tacks on a statement at the end of his argument that is unnecessarily opaque and totally discontinuous with what has come before it: The disciplines, he says, "also present us with methods for exploring those moral issues which arise in the context of the area." Which moral issues? what methods? what context of which area? No explanation is given. His conclusion instead is of such utterly bewildering seriousness that one is left with a reassuring sense of confidence in "the disciplines"—and no sense at all of what "the disciplines" are really about.

Even when the coarse political pressures impinging upon Middle Eastern studies are acknowledged, there is a disquieting tendency to spirit those pressures away and re-establish the canonical authority of Orientalist discourse. It bears repeating that that authority comes directly from a power within Western culture allowing students of the Orient or Islam to make statements about Islam and the Orient that, for a great many years, have been virtually unchallengeable. For who except the Orientalists spoke and continue to speak for the Orient? Neither the nineteenth-century Orientalist nor, in the twentieth century, a scholar like Leonard Binder has doubted that "the field"—and not, it must be noted, the Orient itself or its people—has always supplied Western culture with all that it needed to know about the Orient; consequently anyone who spoke the discipline's language, deployed its concepts, managed its techniques, and acquired its credentials would be able to get beyond prejudice and immediate circumstances in order to make scientific statements. And that sense of self-sufficient, self-correcting, self-endorsing power gave and still gives Orientalism its remarkably un-self-conscious rhetoric. According to

Binder the disciplines, not the people of the Orient, state the normative issues in general terms; the disciplines, not the desires of the people of that area nor the morality of everyday life, "present us with methods for exploring those moral issues which arise in the context of the area."

On the one hand, therefore, "the disciplines" are institutions more than they are activities; on the other hand, they regulate and normalize what they study (which in a sense they have also created) far more readily than they analyze themselves or reflect on what they do. The net result, I think, could only by a kind of tautological indulgence be described as full knowledge of another culture. True, there have been important achievements in the study of Islam: texts have been established and positivistic descriptions of classical Islam have been made very precise. But so far as the *human* dimension of contemporary Islam or the predicament of any interpretative activity is concerned, neither has been greatly illuminated or helped by "the disciplines" of contemporary Middle East studies.

Virtually nothing about the study of Islam today is "free" and undetermined by urgent contemporary pressures. This is very far from the unpolitical objectivity alleged by many Orientalist scholars about their work; and it is almost as far both from the mechanical determinism of vulgar materialists, who see all intellectual and cultural activity as determined in advance by economic forces, and from the happy confidence of specialists who put all their faith in the technical efficiency of "disciplines." Somewhere between those extremes the interpreter's "interests" work themselves out, and are reflected out into the culture at large.

But here too there is less diversity and freedom than we would like to believe. For what is it that makes a topic of interest out of what might otherwise be an academic or antiquarian concern if not power and will, both of which in Western society (as in all others in differing degrees) tend to be organized, to be capable of certain kinds of implementa-

tion, to exercise a redoubtable institutional authority of their own over and above narrow and pragmatic immediacy? A simple instance will make the point quickly: then we can go on to discuss one or two elaborations.

For the general public in America and Europe today, Islam is "news" of a particularly unpleasant sort. The media, the government, the geopolitical strategists, and—although they are marginal to the culture at large—the academic experts on Islam are all in concert: Islam is a threat to Western civilization. Now this is by no means the same as saying that only derogatory or racist caricatures of Islam are to be found in the West. I do not say that, nor would I agree with anyone who did. What I am saying is that negative images of Islam are very much more prevalent than any others, and that such images correspond, not to what Islam "is" (given that "Islam" is not a natural fact but a composite structure created to a certain extent by Muslims and the West in the ways I have tried to describe), but to what prominent sectors of a particular society take it to be. Those sectors have the power and the will to propagate *that* particular image of Islam, and this image therefore becomes more prevalent, more present, than all others. As I said in Chapter One, this is done through the workings of a consensus, which sets limits and applies pressures.

Consider, as a useful case, a series of four seminars held between 1971 and 1978 and funded by the Ford Foundation at Princeton University, which for many social and political reasons is an obviously eye-catching place for academic seminars. In addition to its general fame, Princeton has a renowned and very respectable Program in Near East Studies; called until recently the Department of Oriental Studies, it was founded by Philip Hitti almost half a century ago. Today, the program's orientation—like that of many other Near East programs—is dominated by social and policy scientists. Classical Islamic, Arabic, and Persian literature, for instance, are less well represented in the curriculum and on the faculty than are modern Near Eastern economics, politics, history, and so-

ciology. The cooperation of this program with the Ford Foundation, the country's premier social science foundation, argues—and I would add, is meant to argue—authoritative power of a very high sort in the United States. Any subject focused on under such auspices is thereby given undoubted prominence, for what Princeton proposes and what Ford finances, suggests (and is meant to suggest) emphases, priorities, stresses of major consequence. In short, although they were formulated and conducted by academics, these seminars were held with the national interest in mind. Scholarship was thought of as serving that interest, and as we shall see, the choice of subject matter indicated that political preferences actually resulted in the formulation of scholarly imperatives. It is worth noting in this regard that the Ford Foundation and Princeton were not and are unlikely to be interested in *de luxe* seminars dealing with medieval Arabic grammatical theories, even though on strictly intellectual grounds a much stronger case can be made for such a seminar than for any of the ones that were held.

Be that as it may, what were the seminars about and who attended them? One of them dealt with "slavery and related institutions in Islamic Africa." In the proposal for that seminar much was made of African fear and resentment of Arab Muslims, and it was also noted that "some Israeli scholars" have tried to warn African countries against depending too much on Arab nations "who depopulated their countries in time past."¹² By choosing slavery in Islam the sponsors were highlighting a subject certain to worsen relations between African and Arab Muslims: it was as part of achieving this aim that no scholars from the Arab Muslim world were invited.

A second seminar dealt with the *millet* system, and its main theme was "the position of minorities and in particular of religious minorities within the Muslim state in the Middle East."¹³ *Millet*s were the relatively autonomous minority groupings that existed within the Ottoman Empire. After the breakup of the empire and the end of the various French and

British colonial regimes, a series of new states emerged in the Near East around the time of the Second World War. Most of them were, or attempted to be, nation-states: one (Israel) was a minority religious state in the surrounding Islamic context; another (Lebanon) was to be torn apart in large measure by a militant non-Muslim minority armed and supported by both Israel and the United States.

Far from being a neutral academic topic, "the *millet* system" was in its very formulation the expression of a preferred policy solution for the complex nationality and ethnic problems of the contemporary Islamic world. Whatever the academic reasons for studying it, the *millet* system represents a throwback to an earlier time, by which imperial powers (whether Ottoman or Western) divided and ruled a large and potentially fractious population. To the majority Sunni inhabitants of the region as well as to some of the minorities, the recent history of the modern Islamic world has been a struggle to progress beyond ethnic and religious divisions towards some sort of (perhaps unitary) secular democracy. None of the states of the region have achieved this except in the realm of declared (but usually nonimplemented) policy, but only Israel and the far-right-wing Maronites in Lebanon have actively waged a campaign to revert to a state structure based principally upon minority ethnic autonomy with bilateral links to an outside patron or great power. That this also happens to be the solution proposed for the Palestinians was not a fortuitous matter for the seminar planners, since the person brought to Princeton to speak about the Palestinian Arab "minority" (how many ironies in that designation!) was an Israeli professor. It is also a remarkable fact that as in the case of the slavery conference, no members of the majority Sunni community were invited. That a seminar on so sensitive a topic was held in the United States at such a time (1978), and that so many members of religious and ethnic minorities essentially hostile to what was designated as Islamic rule (and therefore potentially useful to United States policy-planners) partic-

ipated, can hardly be ascribed to scholarly interest. It was no accident that the seminar's principal convener was the same scholar to whom I referred above, the very same person who praised Western intellectual curiosity and derided those academics and all those non-Europeans who saw a political plot in everything.

The first seminar had dealt with the application of psychoanalytic and behavioral techniques of analysis to the understanding of modern Middle Eastern societies. Subsequently a volume based on that seminar's proceedings was published.¹⁴ In the main, the seminar was as one might have expected. There was a central emphasis upon national character studies (though with a rigorous and perspicacious critique by Ali Banuazizi of Iranian character studies so-called, which he very correctly connected to the manipulative aims of imperial powers with designs on Iran¹⁵). The results were dreadfully predictable. In the book we are told many times that Muslims live in a make-believe world, that the family is repressive, that most leaders are psychopathological, that the societies are immature, and so on. All of this is not presented from the point of view of scholars interested in changing these societies into "mature" ones, but from the perspective of neutral, objective, and value-free scientists. No allowances are made for what positions such scientists (however neutral and value-free they may be) occupy in relation to corporate and governmental powers, what roles their investigations play in the conduct of governmental policies towards the Muslim world, what the methodological implications of psychology are for the study of a weak society by a stronger one.

No investigation of these matters was to be found in the fourth seminar, whose title was "Land, Population, and Society in the Near East: Studies in Economic History from the Rise of Islam to the Nineteenth Century." Like the others, this seminar also presented itself as scholarly and impartial, although beneath the surface could be seen a quite pressing policy concern: in this instance, it was an interest in the rela-

tionship between landholding, demographic patterns, and state authority as indices of stability (or instability) in modern Muslim societies. We should not conclude that every contribution to the seminar was objectively valueless, nor that each participating scholar was a party to a nefarious conspiracy. The organizers had very sagely seen to it that there was "balance" between views, and that taken as a whole, the seminar should appear responsible and serious. On the other hand, we ought not to fall into the trap of regarding the enterprise itself as being only the mechanical sum of its many discrete parts. In the choice of over-all topics and trends the four seminars undertook to shape awareness of Islam in terms that either distanced it as a hostile phenomenon or highlighted certain aspects of it that could be "managed" in policy terms.

In this regard the Princeton seminars on Islam conformed to the history of other Third World area-studies programs in the United States—for example, the immediate postwar period in the academic study of China.¹⁰ The difference is that Islamic programs have yet to be "revised": they are still dominated by outmoded, impossibly vague concepts (like "Islam" itself) and an intellectual idiom that are out of touch with what has gone on generally in the human sciences and in the society as a whole. It is still possible to say things about Islam that are simply unacceptable for Judaism, for other Asians, or for blacks, and it is still possible to write studies of Islamic history and society that blithely ignore every major advance in interpretative theory since Nietzsche, Marx, and Freud.

The result is that very little of what goes on in the study of Islam has much to say to scholars interested in the methodological problems of general historiography, say, or in textual analysis. Instead, if we take the Princeton seminars as a perfect case in point, a scholarly work on Islam appears (as the volume on psychology in Middle East studies appeared), it is reviewed by one or two highly specialized publications of limited circulation, and then it disappears. Precisely this mar-

ginality, this willed irrelevance for the general culture, of Islamic studies makes it possible for scholars to go on doing what they have been doing, and for the media to take over the dissemination of racist caricatures of the Islamic peoples. In this way the scholarly constituency perpetuates itself, while the clientele for Islam as news continues to get the massive doses of Islamic punishment and harem capers it has been fed for decades. When the experts venture into the public eye it is as experts, brought in because an emergency has caught "the West" unprepared. Their pronouncements are neither cushioned nor refined by any residual cultural feeling for Islam, as in Britain or France. They are viewed as technicians with "a solid set of 'how-tos'" (the phrase is Dwight MacDonald's)¹⁷ to present to the anxious public. And the public takes kindly to them, for they are an answer to what Christopher Lasch has called

an unprecedented demand for experts, technicians and managers [created by what Lasch calls "the postindustrial order"]. Both business and government, under the pressure of technological revolution, expanding population, and the indefinitely prolonged emergency of the cold war, became increasingly dependent on a vast apparatus of systematized data intelligible only to trained specialists; and the universities, accordingly, became themselves industries for the mass-production of experts.¹⁸

The market for expertise is so attractive and lucrative that work done on the Middle East is directed almost exclusively at it. This one reason that in none of the established journals (nor for that matter in recent books by established scholars) is there any attention paid to the basic questions *Why* Middle East studies? and *For whom* are they being transacted? The obliteration of the methodological consciousness is absolutely coterminous with the presence of the market (governments, corporations, foundations): one simply does not ask why one does what one does if there is an appreciative, or at least a potentially receptive, clientele. Worse yet, the

scholar stops thinking in terms of the region and the people about whom studies are being conducted. Islam, if it is "Islam" that is being studied, is not an interlocutor but in a sense a commodity. The over-all result is a kind of institutional bad faith. The scholarly honor and integrity of the field are upheld against critical outsiders, scholarly rhetoric is willfully arrogant about denying political partisanship, and scholarly self-congratulation fortifies present practices indefinitely.

What I have been describing is an essentially lonely enterprise, which means in this case that the scholar works reactively in answer to what various interests seem to require of him or her; he or she is guided more by a guild orthodoxy than by the exigencies of genuine interpretation, and above all, the general culture ghettoizes his or her work, rendering it marginal except during times of crisis. Neither of the two necessary conditions for knowing another culture—uncoercive contact with an alien culture through real exchange, and self-consciousness about the interpretative project itself—is present, and this absence enforces the solitude, the provinciality, and the circularity of covering Islam. Significantly, these things also make it evident that covering Islam is not interpretation in the genuine sense but an assertion of power. The media say what they wish about Islam because they can, with the result that Islamic punishment and "good" Muslims (in Afghanistan, for instance) dominate the scene indiscriminately; little else is covered because anything falling outside the consensus definition of what is important is considered irrelevant to United States interests and to the media's definition of a good story. The academic community, on the other hand, responds to what it construes as national and corporate needs, with the result that suitable Islamic topics are hewn out of an enormous mass of Islamic details, and these topics (slavery, the *millet* system, and so forth) define both Islam and the proper study of Islam so as to exclude everything not fitting neatly between them. Even when on occasion the government or one of the university Middle East departments or one of the

foundations organizes a conference to deal with the future of Middle East studies (which is usually a euphemism for "What are we going to do about the Islamic world?"), the same battery of concepts and goals keeps turning up. Little is changed.

A great deal is staked on this repetition, not least a fairly well run system of patronage. The senior experts in the field, whether from the government, the corporation world, or the university, tend to have connections with one another and with compliant donors. A young scholar depends on this network for his or her subventions, to say nothing of employment and the possibility of publication in the established journals. To venture unfriendly critiques of the recognized scholars or of their work, in this field more than in the fields of general history or literature, is to risk too much. Book reviews as a result are insipid and mainly complimentary; criticism is uniformly couched in the most pedantic language possible, and nothing is ever said about methodology or assumptions. The most curious omission—and the most routine—is the analysis of the connection between scholarship and the various forms of power in the society for which this scholarship is produced. And the moment a voice is heard that challenges this conspiracy of silence, ideology and ethnic origins become the main topic: He (or she) is a Marxist; or, He (or she) is a Palestinian (or an Iranian, or a Muslim, or a Syrian)—and we know what *they're* like.¹⁹ As for the sources themselves, they are always treated as if they were inert; thus in discussing a contemporary Islamic society or a movement or a figure, the scholar refers to what is being discussed mainly as *evidence*, rarely as something entitled to its own integrity or to its right, in a sense, to reply. Interestingly, there has never been any systematic attempt by Western experts on Islam to deal methodologically with Islamic writing on Islam: is it scholarship? is it evidence? is it neither?

Yet despite this rather arid state of affairs, or perhaps even because of it, some knowledge of value about Islam is produced, and some independent minds manage to get

through the desert. In the main, however, the over-all marginality, the over-all *intellectual* incoherence (as opposed to guild consensus), the over-all interpretative bankruptcy of most—though by no means all—writing on Islam can be traced to the old-boy corporation-government-university network dominating the whole enterprise. And that, finally, determines the way the United States views the Islamic world. For why else could so peculiar a structure of knowledge about Islam develop and thrive, so intertwined, well established, untroubled by one failure after another?

The most effective way of understanding the precise quality of this vision, which has the force of unquestioned faith, is to compare it once again with the situation obtaining in Britain and France, those two predecessors of the United States in the Islamic world. In both countries there has always been a cadre of Islamic experts, of course, with a longstanding advisory role in formulating—and even executing—government as well as commercial policy. But in both instances there was an immediate task at hand: the administering of rule in colonies. This was the case until the end of World War II. The Islamic world was viewed as a discrete series of problems, and knowledge about those problems was on the whole positivistic as well as directly engaged. Theories and abstractions about the Islamic mind, in France about the *mission civilisatrice*, in Britain about self-rule for subject peoples, intervened here and there in the conduct of policy, but always after the policy was in place and on the ground, so to speak. Discourse about Islam played the role essentially of justifying the national (or even a private economic) interest in the Islamic world. This is why today in France and Britain great scholars of Islam are public figures whose *raison d'être*, even now that the colonial empires have been dissolved, is to maintain a French or a British interest in the Islamic world. For a number of others reasons such scholars on the whole tend to be humanists, not social scientists, and their support in the general culture comes less from the postindustrial cult of expertise (which exists in

both countries) than from broad intellectual and moral currents in the society. Rodinson in France is a great philologist who is also a well-known Marxist; Hourani in England is a famous historian and a man whose work represents an evident liberalism.²⁰ Such persons are disappearing, however, and in both France and England, American-style social scientists or specialized antiquarians are likely to replace them in the future.

Similar scholars in the United States are known only as Middle East or Islamic experts; they belong to the class of experts, and their domain, insofar as they are concerned with modern societies in the Islamic world, can be regarded as the intellectual equivalent of crisis management. Much of their status derives from the notion that for the United States the Islamic world is a strategic area, with all sorts of *possible* (if not always actual) problems. During their many decades of administering Islamic colonies, both Britain and France naturally produced a class of colonial experts, but this class did not in turn produce an adjunct to it equivalent to the network of the Middle East studies-government-corporate alliance that exists in the United States. Professors of Arabic or Persian or Islamic institutions did their work in British and French universities; they were called on for advice and even participation by the colonial departments and by private business enterprises; they occasionally held congresses; but they do not seem to have created an independent structure of their own, sustained and even maintained by the private business sector or directly by foundations and the government.

Knowledge and coverage of the Islamic world, therefore, are defined in the United States by geopolitics and economic interests on—for the individual—an impossibly massive scale, aided and abetted by a structure of knowledge production that is almost as vast and unmanageable. What is the student of Arabian or Trucial States tribes to do about the interposition between him or her and those tribes of the oil company's presence, about the active talk and promotion of rapid-deployment forces (see the *Newsweek* cover story, "Defending the

Oilfields: The U.S. Military Buildup," on July 14, 1980) for the Gulf area, about the whole apparatus of Middle East "hands" at the State Department, the corporations and foundations, the array of senior Orientalist professors? Of what sort can knowledge of another culture actually be when it is so hemmed in by the hypothetical urgencies of "the crescent of crisis" on the one hand and by the thriving institutional affiliations between scholarship, business, and the government on the other?

Let me conclude this section by trying to answer the question very concretely in two parts. First, the actual conditions and the facts and figures governing what might be called orthodox working coverage of Islam. I shall concentrate on the United States, but a very similar situation is gradually coming to obtain in Europe as well. According to a useful French survey of American Middle East studies centers, about 1,650 Middle East specialists in 1970 taught the area's languages to 2,659 graduate students and 4,150 undergraduates (respectively 12 percent and 7.4 percent of the total number of graduates and undergraduates majoring in "area studies"²¹). Area courses on the Middle East enrolled 6,400 graduates and 22,300 undergraduates (which was 12.6 percent of the total). Yet in recent years the number of Ph.D.'s produced in Middle East studies has been a proportionately small one—less than 1 percent of the nation's Ph.D. graduates.²² According to a perspicacious study of Middle East centers at American universities done by Richard Nolte (commissioned, interestingly enough, by Esso Middle East, a division of Exxon) and published in 1979, the Office of Education supported area studies "to develop experts and specialists quickly and in large numbers for government, corporate and educational purposes." The universities have complied with this outlook: "From a university point of view," Nolte writes appropriately, "the [Middle East] centers can be seen as a promising new marketing mechanism for university output—helping not only to produce a more marketable

product, area-trained specialists of useful disciplines and professionals for potentially huge new markets, but also to create the markets." And he says in connection with M.A. programs, "The governmental, corporate, banking and other professional markets for appropriately trained MA's with a Middle East dimension is comparatively brisk, thanks to economic and political factors similar to all."²³

Just as the Princeton seminars I referred to help to shape intellectual concerns in the scholarly community, so too do these market realities affect the scholarly curriculum. Heaviest emphasis in Middle East studies is placed on fields like Islamic law and the Arab-Israeli conflict: their relevance is obvious on the face of it. But a concomitant is that literature, according to Nolte, is neglected, as are the reasonably large groups of Middle Eastern students enrolled in American universities. Moreover, Nolte says, center directors he interviewed

mentioned incidents involving organized political pressure often of off-campus origin, to prevent or discredit Arab-connected activities regarded as academically legitimate and desirable by the centers concerned. Arab cultural events, film showings, visiting speakers, acceptance of Arab budgetary support funds—anything could become a target. Awareness of this has imposed a pervasive inhibition which few directors fail to resent—or can afford to ignore. Some directors felt matters were improving, others were not so sure.²⁴

All these things—politics, pressures, markets—make themselves felt in various ways. The need for expertise about the contemporary Middle East produces many courses, many students, and a marked emphasis upon accepting and maintaining the instrumental perspectives of knowledge that is both lucrative and immediately applicable. Another result is that methodological investigations simply do not occur: a student wishing to make a career in Middle East studies will first of all dread the long and arid years necessary for obtaining a Ph.D. (with no certainty that he or she will get a teaching job as a

result); then he or she will acquire an M.A. or an international-studies diploma in a subject attractive to the biggest employers (the government, the oil companies, the international investment houses, contracting firms); finally, the work will tend to be done as quickly as possible in the form of a case study. All this isolates study of Islam or the Middle East from other intellectual and moral currents in the scholarly community. The media will seem like a more promising stage upon which to display expertise than, for instance, a general intellectual journal, and in the media, as habitués know, you are either a partisan (an extremely limiting thing) or you are a cool expert, called on impartially to make judgments about Shi'ism and anti-Americanism. The role of expert furthers one's career obviously enough, unless one has already done well in business or in the government.

This may seem like a parody of how knowledge gets produced, but it fairly describes the extreme narrowing of focus and the disastrous thinning of substance in knowledge of Islam. Above all, it explains why it is that far from challenging the vulgar stereotypes circulated in the media, the academic experts on Islam are as a body neutralized in their isolated, immediately functional role as status symbols of relevant authority on Islam, and also dependent on the whole system constituting and legitimating their function within it: and it is this system which the media, in their reliance upon stereotypes based on fear and ignorance, reflect.

If what I have been describing seems intellectually restrictive—as indeed it is—it does not prevent the production of a huge amount of material on the Middle East, on Islam, and indeed on other parts of the Third World. In other words, we have to do with what Foucault, in another connection, has called “an incitement to discourse.”²⁵ Very different from a simple interventionary censorship, the intellectual regulation of discourse about distant and alien cultures positively and affirmatively encourages more of itself. This is why it has persisted despite changes taking place in the world, and this is why it has continued to draw recruits to its service.

All in all, present coverage of Islam and of non-Western societies in effect canonizes certain notions, texts, and authorities. The idea that Islam is medieval and dangerous, for example, has acquired a place both in the culture and in the polity that is very well defined: authorities can be cited for it readily, references can be made to it, arguments about particular instances of Islam can be adduced from it—by anyone, not just by experts or by journalists. And in turn such an idea furnishes a kind of *a priori* touchstone to be taken account of by anyone wishing to discuss or say something about Islam. From being something out there, Islam—or rather, the material invariably associated with it—is turned into an orthodoxy of *this* society. It enters the cultural canon, and this makes the task of changing it very difficult indeed.

So much for the orthodox coverage of Islam, coverage whose affiliations with power give it strength, durability, and above all, *presence*. Yet there is another view of Islam circulating which belongs to the category of what might be called *antithetical knowledge*.²⁶

By antithetical knowledge I mean the kind of knowledge produced by people who quite consciously consider themselves to be writing in opposition to the prevailing orthodoxy. As we shall see, they do so for varying reasons and in different situations, but all of these people have a pronounced sense that how and for what reason they study Islam are questions that require deliberation and explicitness. In these antithetical interpreters, the methodological silence of Orientalism, which has usually been overlaid by layers of optimistic confidence in value-free objectivity, is replaced by urgent discussion of the political meanings of scholarship.

There are three main types of antithetical knowledge of Islam and, producing it, three forces within the society in a position to challenge the orthodoxy. One is a group of younger scholars. They tend to be more sophisticated, and more honest politically, than their elders in the field; they see work on Islam as in some way connected to the political activities of the state and therefore make no pretense of being

"objective" scholars. For them the fact that the United States is involved in a global politics, a great deal of it having to do with the Muslim world, is not something to be silent about or to accept as a neutral truth. Unlike the older Orientalists they are specialists rather than generalists, and they have welcomed such innovative methodological instruments as structural anthropology, quantitative methods, and Marxist modes of analysis with real interest and often successful applications.²⁷ They seem especially sensitive to the ethnocentric forms of Orientalist discourse, and most of them—because they are young—are relative outsiders to the patronage system that keeps the senior members of the profession in Scotch and tweed suits. From their ranks have appeared the Alternative Middle East Studies Seminar (AMESS) and the Middle East Research and Information Project (MERIP), both of which were founded as organizations specifically designed to avoid complicity with the government and the oil companies; similar groups have been formed in Europe, and all of them have links to each other. Not all of the younger scholars I am referring to belong in these groups, but most of them are avowedly revisionist in their aims. All of them seek to cover Islam from perspectives either neglected by or unknown to their seniors.

A second group is made up of older scholars whose own work, for too many reasons to summarize schematically, runs counter to the orthodox scholarship dominating the field. Hamid Algar of Berkeley and Nikki Keddie of UCLA, for example, were two of the very few Iranologists who for some years before the Iranian revolution had taken seriously the political role of the *'ulama* (the Shi'ite clergy in Iran). Algar and Keddie are very different from each other, even though both of them voiced considerable doubts about the stability of the Pahlevi regime. Similarly, Ervand Abrahamian of Baruch College, whose studies of the secular opposition to the shah provided a brilliant series of insights into the revolution's political dynamics; or more recently, Michael G. Fischer of Harvard and, in England, Fred Halliday, both of them scholars

who for intellectual as well as academic reasons stood away from the majority view of Iran and, as a result, did extraordinarily valuable work on contemporary Iran.²⁸

The interesting thing about this group of antithetical writers on Islam is that they cannot be reduced to a methodological and ideological characterization that does them any sort of justice. Nevertheless, it is a striking fact that almost none of them belongs to the establishment in Middle East studies. This is not to say that they are not distinguished and respected figures; they are, but few if any of them have been actively and institutionally involved as consultants to governments or to corporations. Perhaps this fact has freed them from obligation to the status quo and enabled them to see things that conventional writers on Islam have bypassed. Yet it must be said about them, and about the group of younger scholars referred to above, that in order for their work to have the effect it potentially can have, they must become more political in this society. It is not enough for them to have views that distinguish them from orthodox experts; they must try to give their views currency, and because such an effort will have to go considerably beyond writing things and getting them published, they have a long political and organizational struggle ahead of them.

Lastly, there is a group of writers, activists, and intellectuals who are not accredited experts on Islam but whose role in society is determined by their over-all oppositional stance: these are the antiwar and anti-imperialist militants, the dissenting clergy, the radical intellectuals and teachers, and so on. Their insight into Islam has very little to do with the wisdom of Orientalists, although some of them have been influenced by the cultural Orientalism that is to be found everywhere in the West. Nevertheless—if we consider a man like I. F. Stone as an example—the cultural distrust of and antipathy towards Islam is tempered by an even stronger feeling about what imperialism is like and what, no matter whether it is Jews, Muslims, or Christians who are involved, human suffer-

ing is like. Stone was unique in predicting the consequences of continuing United States support for the shah after the revolution, and it was people like him and not the governmental and academic experts on Iran who advocated a conciliatory policy towards the revolutionary regime.

The impressive thing about such people is how, despite their lack of expert certification, they seem to understand certain dynamics within the postcolonial world and hence within large portions of the Islamic world. For them human experience, and not limiting labels like "the Islamic mind" or "the Islamic personality," defines the unit of attention. Moreover, they are genuinely interested in exchange, and have made it a matter of conscious choice to overstep the rigid lines of hostility put down between peoples by governments. One thinks quintessentially here of Ramsey Clark going to Teheran and of the courageous role played during the worst days of the Iran crisis by individuals like Richard Falk, William Sloane Coffin, Jr., Don Luce, and others too numerous to mention, as well as organizations such as the Friends Service Committee, Clergy and Laity Concerned, and other groups like them. In addition, as a part of this dissenting configuration we ought to include various publications and alternative news organizations, among them *Seven Days*, *Mother Jones*, *In These Times*, *The Guardian*, the Pacific News Service, and *Christianity and Crisis*, who opened their pages and made their resources available to oppositional views on Iran and—less frequently, alas—on Islam. The same phenomenon is repeated in Europe.

What is most important, in my opinion, about these three groups is that for them knowledge is essentially an actively sought out and contested thing, not merely a passive recitation of facts and "accepted" views. The struggle between this view, as it bears upon other cultures and beyond that into wide political questions, and the specialized institutional knowledge fostered by the dominant powers of advanced Western society is an epochal matter. It far transcends the question whether a

view is pro- or anti-Islamic, or whether one is a patriot or a traitor. As our world grows more tightly knit together, the control of scarce resources, strategic areas, and large populations will seem more desirable and more necessary. Carefully fostered fears of anarchy and disorder will very likely produce conformity of views and, with reference to the "outside" world, greater distrust: this is as true of the Islamic world as it is of the West. At such a time—which has already begun—the production and diffusion of knowledge will play an absolutely crucial role. Yet until knowledge is understood in human and political terms as something to be won to the service of coexistence and community, not of particular races, nations, classes, or religions, the future augurs badly.

II. Knowledge and Interpretation

☾ All knowledge that is about human society, and not about the natural world, is historical knowledge, and therefore rests upon judgment and interpretation. This is not to say that facts or data are nonexistent, but that facts get their importance from what is made of them in interpretation. No one disputes the fact that Napoleon actually lived and was a French emperor; there is however, a great deal of interpretative disagreement as to whether he was a great or in some ways a disastrous ruler of France. Such disagreements are the stuff out of which historical writing is made and from which historical knowledge derives. For interpretations depend very much on who the interpreter is, who he or she is addressing, what his or her purpose is in interpreting, at what historical moment the interpretation takes place. In this sense, all interpretations are what might be called *situational*: they always occur in a situation whose bearing on the interpretation is *affiliative*.²⁹ It is related to what other interpreters have said, either by confirming them, or by disputing them, or by continuing them. No interpretation is without precedents or with-

out some connection to other interpretations. Thus anyone writing seriously about Islam, or China, or Shakespeare, or Marx, must in some way take account of what has been said about these subjects, if only because he or she wishes not to be irrelevant or redundant. No writing is (or can be) so new as to be completely original, for in writing about human society one is not doing mathematics, and therefore one cannot aspire to the radical originality possible in that activity.

Knowledge of other cultures, then, is especially subject to "unscientific" imprecision and to the circumstances of interpretation. Nevertheless, we can say tentatively that knowledge of another culture is possible, and it is important to add, desirable, if two conditions are fulfilled—which, incidentally, are precisely the two conditions that today's Middle Eastern or Islamic studies by and large do not fulfill. One, the student must feel that he or she is answerable to and in uncoercive contact with the culture and the people being studied. As I said earlier, most of what the West knew about the non-Western world it knew in the framework of colonialism; the European scholar therefore approached his subject from a general position of dominance, and what he said *about* this subject was said with little reference to what anyone but other European scholars had said. For the many reasons I have enumerated earlier in this book and in *Orientalism*, knowledge of Islam and of Islamic peoples has generally proceeded not only from dominance and confrontation but also from cultural antipathy. Today Islam is defined negatively as that with which the West is radically at odds, and this tension establishes a framework radically limiting knowledge of Islam. So long as this framework stands, Islam, as a vitally lived experience for Muslims, cannot be known. This, unfortunately, is particularly true in the United States, and only slightly less true in Europe.

The second condition complements and fulfills the first. Knowledge of the social world, as opposed to knowledge of nature, is at bottom what I have been calling interpretation: it acquires the status of knowledge by various means, some of

them intellectual, many of them social and even political. Interpretation is first of all a form of making: that is, it depends on the willed intentional activity of the human mind, molding and forming the objects of its attention with care and study. Such an activity takes place perforce in a specific time and place and is engaged in by a specifically located individual, with a specific background, in a specific situation, for a particular series of ends. Therefore the interpretation of texts, which is what the knowledge of other cultures is principally based on, neither takes place in a clinically secure laboratory nor pretends to objective results. It is a social activity and inextricably tied to the situation out of which it arose in the first place, which then either gives it the status of knowledge or rejects it as unsuitable for that status. No interpretation can neglect this situation, and no interpretation is complete without an interpretation of the situation.

It will be evident that such unscientific nuisances as feelings, habits, conventions, associations, and values are an intrinsic part of any interpretation. Every interpreter is a reader, and there is no such thing as a neutral or value-free reader. Every reader, in other words, is both a private ego and a member of a society, with affiliations of every sort linking him or her to that society. Working through national feelings like patriotism or chauvinism to private emotions like fear or despair, the interpreter must seek in a disciplined way to employ reason and the information he or she has gained through formal education (itself a long interpretative process) so that understanding may be achieved. A great effort has to be made to pierce the barriers that exist between one situation, the situation of the interpreter, and another, the situation that existed when and where the text was produced. It is precisely this conscious willed effort of overcoming distances and cultural barriers that makes knowledge of other societies and cultures possible—and at the same time limits that knowledge. At that moment, the interpreter understands himself or herself in his or her human situation and the text in relation to its

situation, the human situation out of which it came. This can occur only as the result of self-awareness animating an awareness of what is distant and alien but human nonetheless. It scarcely needs to be said that this whole process has very little to do either with "the new and totally different knowledge" alluded to by the conventional Orientalist, or with Professor Binder's self-correcting "disciplines."

One thing more needs to be said in this rather abstract description of the interpretative process at the end of which knowledge—by no means a stable thing—is arrived at. There is never interpretation, understanding, and then knowledge where there is no *interest*. This may seem like the most pedestrian truism, but it is exactly this fairly obvious truth that is usually ignored or denied. For an American scholar to read and decode a contemporary Arabic or Japanese novel involves a totally different sort of engagement with an alien object than that of a chemist decoding a chemical formula. Chemical elements are not intrinsically affective and do not engage one's human feelings, though of course even they may trigger emotional associations in the scientist for wholly extrinsic reasons. The opposite is true in what might be called humanistic interpretation, which according to many theorists actually begins in awareness of the interpreter's prejudices, sense of alienation from the text to be interpreted, and so on. As Hans-Georg Gadamer has written:

A person trying to understand a text is prepared for it to tell him something. That is why a hermeneutically trained mind must be, from the start, sensitive to the text's quality of newness. But this kind of sensitivity involves neither "neutrality" in the matter of the object nor the extinction of one's self, but the conscious assimilation of one's own foremeanings [that is, those meanings or interpretations that already exist as a result of past experiences] and prejudices. The important thing is to be aware of one's own bias, so that the text may present itself in all its newness and thus be able to assert its own truth against one's own foremeanings.³⁰

Therefore, the first thing to be aware of in reading a text produced in an alien culture is its distance, the main condition of its distance (in both time and space) being quite literally, although not exclusively, the presence of the interpreter in his or her time and place. As we saw, the orthodox Orientalist or "area studies" approach is to equate distance with authority, to incorporate the foreignness of a distant culture into the authoritative rhetoric of a scholarly discourse, which has the social status of knowledge, with no acknowledgment of what that foreignness exacted from the interpreter and no acknowledgment of what structure of power made the interpreter's job possible. I mean quite simply that, almost without exception, no writer on Islam in the West today reckons explicitly with the fact that "Islam" is considered a hostile culture, or that anything said about Islam by a professional scholar is within the sphere of influence of corporations and the government, both of which in turn play a very large role in making interpretations and, subsequently, knowledge of Islam desirable and "in the national interest." In the argument that I analyzed above, Leonard Binder is typical: he mentions these matters, then he makes them disappear in a sentence paying homage to professionalism and "the disciplines," whose collective function is an efficient way of dismissing whatever disturbs their mask of rational objectivity. This is an instance of socially acceptable knowledge erasing the steps by which it was produced.

As an aspect of interpretation, "interest" can be glossed a good deal further and much more concretely. No one simply happens upon Islam, Islamic culture, or Islamic society. For the citizen of a Western industrial state today, Islam is encountered by virtue either of the political oil crisis, or of intense media attention, or of the longstanding tradition of expert—that is, Orientalist—commentary on Islam in the West. Take the case of a young historian who wishes to specialize in modern Middle Eastern history. He or she comes to study that subject with all three factors in play, all of them

molding and shaping the situation in which "the facts"—the supposedly raw data—are apprehended. In addition, there are the individual's own history, sensibility, and intellectual gifts to be figured in. Taken together these constitute a significant measure of his or her interest in the subject: sheer curiosity is tempered by such things as the promise of consulting work for the State Department or oil companies, a wish to become a famous scholar, a desire to "prove" that Islam is a wonderful (or for that matter, a terrible) cultural system, an ambition to serve as a bridge of understanding between this culture and that, a desire to know. The texts, the professors, the scholarly tradition, the specific moment, add their imprint to what this young historian is going to study. In the end there are other things to be considered too. If one has studied the history of nineteenth-century Syrian land tenure, for instance, it is extremely likely that even the drier and most "objective" treatment of the subject will have some contemporary policy relevance, particularly for a government official who is anxious to understand the dynamics of traditional authority (which is connected to land ownership) in contemporary Syria.

But if, in the first place, some effort is made to have uncoercive contact with a distant culture, and secondly, if the interpreter is consciously aware of the interpretative situation in which he or she is to be found (that is, if the interpreter understands that knowledge of another culture is not absolute but is relative to the interpretative situation in which that knowledge gets produced), then it is more than likely that the interpreter will feel the orthodox view of Islam and of other "alien" cultures to be an acutely limited one. By comparison, antithetical knowledge of Islam seems to go a reasonable distance towards overcoming the limitations of orthodox views. Precisely because the antithetical scholars reject the notion that knowledge of Islam ought to be subservient to the government's immediate policy interests, they highlight the complicity between knowledge and power. And in doing so they seek to establish other relationships with Islam than those

ordained by the imperatives of power. Looking for alternative relationships means looking for other interpretative situations; hence, a far more scrupulous methodological sense is developed.

In the end, though, there is never any simple escape from what some critics have called the interpretative circle. Knowledge of the social world, in short, is *always* no better than the interpretations on which it is based. All our knowledge of so complex and elusive a phenomenon as Islam comes about through texts, images, experiences that are not direct embodiments of Islam (which is after all apprehended only through instances of it) but representations or interpretations of it. In other words, all knowledge of other cultures, societies, or religions comes about through an admixture of indirect evidence with the individual scholar's personal situation, which includes time, place, personal gifts, historical situation, as well as the overall political circumstances. What makes such knowledge accurate or inaccurate, bad, better, or worse, has to do mainly with the needs of the society in which that knowledge is produced. There is, of course, a level of simple factuality without which no knowledge can occur: after all, how can one "know" Islam in Morocco without knowing Arabic, Berber, and something about the country and its society? But beyond that, knowledge of Moroccan Islam is not a mere matter of correspondence between there and here, an inert object and its beholder, but an interaction of the two (usually) for a purpose *here*: for example, a learned article, a lecture, advice to the policy-maker. Insofar as the purpose is fulfilled, knowledge is considered to have been produced. There are other uses for knowledge (including even the use of uselessness), but the main ones tend to be very functional or instrumental.

What passes for knowledge, therefore, is a very mixed thing indeed, and is determined less by intrinsic needs (which are rarely intrinsic anyway) than by extrinsic ones. A study of the Iranian elite under the Pahlavis done by an American academic with good credentials may be useful for policy-

makers having to deal with the imperial regime; to an unorthodox expert on Iran, the very same study will be riddled with errors and misjudgments.³¹ The radically differing standards of judgment do not, however, suggest the need for still better touchstones, still firmer absolutes; rather, they ought to remind us that it is the nature of interpretation to send us back to the problems raised by interpretation itself, to asking the questions for whom, for what purpose, and why such an interpretation is more convincing in this context than in that. Interpretation, knowledge, and, as Matthew Arnold said, culture itself are always the result of contests and not simply a gift from heaven.

My thesis in this book has been that the canonical, orthodox coverage of Islam that we find in the academy, in the government, and in the media is all interrelated and has been *more* diffused, has seemed *more* persuasive and influential, in the West than any other "coverage" or interpretation. The success of this coverage can be attributed to the political influence of those people and institutions producing it rather than necessarily to truth or accuracy. I have also argued that this coverage has served purposes only tangentially related to actual knowledge of Islam itself. The result has been the triumph not just of a particular *knowledge* of Islam but rather of a particular *interpretation* which, however, has neither been unchallenged nor impervious to the kinds of questions asked by unorthodox, inquiring minds.

It is therefore just as well that "Islam" has not been particularly useful in explaining the Iran-Iraq war, any more than ideas about "the Negro mentality" were useful in explaining the twentieth-century experiences of black Americans. For aside from giving narcissistic satisfaction to the expert who employs them and whose livelihood often depends on them, these totalitarian concepts have kept up neither with the sheer force of events nor with the complex forces that produced the events. The result has been an ever-widening rift between the assertions of homogenizing concepts and the far more power-

ful assertions and discontinuities of actual history. And into this rift has occasionally stepped an individual who asks pertinent questions and expects reasonable answers.

No one can know everything about the world we live in, and so the division of intellectual labor will have to continue foreseeably. The academy requires that division, knowledge itself demands it, society in the West is organized around it. But most knowledge about human society is, I think, finally accessible to common sense—that is, the sense that grows out of the common human experience—and is, indeed must be, subject to some sort of critical assessment. These two things, common sense and critical assessment, are in the final analysis social and generally intellectual attributes available to and cultivatable by everyone, not the privilege of a special class nor the possession of a handful of certified “experts.” Yet special training is necessary if one is to learn Arabic or Chinese, or if one is to understand the meaning of economic, historical, and demographic trends. And the academy is the place for making that training available: of this I have no doubt at all. The trouble comes when training produces guilds who, losing touch with the realities of community, good sense, and intellectual responsibility, either promote the guild at all costs or put it too willingly and uncritically at the service of power. In both instances, foreign societies or cultures like Islam end up being covered more than elucidated or understood. There is even the danger that new fictions will be invented and unheard-of varieties of disinformation circulated.

At almost any given moment during the past few years there has been considerable evidence, available to anyone, that the non-Western world generally and Islam in particular no longer conform to the patterns mapped out by American or European social scientists, Orientalists, and area experts in the immediate postwar years. It is certainly true that the Islamic world as a whole is neither completely anti-American and anti-Soviet nor unified and predictable in its actions. Without trying to give an exhaustive account of these changes, I have

been saying that this has meant the emergence of new and irregular realities in the Islamic world; it is no less true that similar irregularities, disturbing the calm theoretical descriptions of earlier years, have emerged in other parts of the post-colonial world. Merely to reassert the old formulas about “underdevelopment” and “the Afro-Asian mentality” is foolish enough; but to connect these causally with notions about the sad decline of the West, the unfortunate end of colonialism, and the regrettable diminishment of American power is, I must say as strongly as possible, rank folly. There is simply no way in which societies thousands of miles away from the Atlantic world in both space and identity can be made to conform to what we want of them. One can consider this a neutral fact without also regarding it (as I happen to) as a good thing. In any event, the danger in talking about the loss of Iran and the decline of the West in the same breath is that we immediately foreclose the possibility of most courses of action—except the ascendancy of the West and the regaining of places like Iran and the Gulf. The recent success of “experts” who in their work bewail the end of British or American or French dominion in the Islamic world is, in my opinion, frightening testimony to what might be lurking in the minds of policymakers, and to what deep needs for aggression and reconquest these “experts,” consciously or unconsciously, really serve.³² That there are compliant natives who play in the same orchestra belongs to the shabby history of collaboration and is not (as some would have it) a sign of new maturity in the Third World.

Except for the purposes of conquest, “Islam” is not what it is generally said to be in the West today. Immediately, then, we must provide an alternative: if “Islam” tells us far less than it ought to, if it covers up more than it covers, where—or rather, how—are we to look for information that encourages neither new dreams of power nor old fears and prejudices? In this book I have mentioned and sometimes described the kinds of investigations that are most useful at this point, and I

have also said that all of them begin with the idea that all knowledge is interpretation, and that interpretation must be self-conscious in its methods and its aims if it is to be vigilant and humane, if it is also to arrive at knowledge. But underlying every interpretation of other cultures—especially of Islam—is the choice facing the individual scholar or intellectual: whether to put intellect at the service of power or at the service of criticism, community, and moral sense. This choice must be the first act of interpretation today, and it must result in a decision, not simply a postponement. If the history of knowledge about Islam in the West has been too closely tied to conquest and domination, the time has come for these ties to be severed completely. About this one cannot be too emphatic. For otherwise we will not only face protracted tension and perhaps even war, but we will offer the Muslim world, its various societies and states, the prospect of many wars, unimaginable suffering, and disastrous upheavals, not the least of which would be the birth of an "Islam" fully ready to play the role prepared for it by reaction, orthodoxy, and desperation. By even the most sanguine of standards, this is not a pleasant possibility.

Notes

INTRODUCTION

1. Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978; reprint ed., New York: Vintage Books, 1979).
2. Edward W. Said, *The Question of Palestine*. (New York: Times Books, 1979; reprint ed., New York: Vintage Books, 1980).
3. For a reference to this see Robert Graham, "The Middle East Muddle," *New York Review of Books*, October 23, 1980, p. 26.
4. J. B. Kelly, *Arabia, The Gulf, and the West: A Critical View of the Arabs and Their Oil Policy* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1980), p. 504.
5. Thomas N. Franck and Edward Weisband, *Word Politics: Verbal Strategy Among the Superpowers* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1971).
6. See Paul Marijn's, "De Dubbelrol van een Islam-Kennen," *NRC Handelsblad*, December 12, 1979. Marijn's article is a report of research done on Snouck Hurgronje by Professor van Koningveld of the Theological Faculty at the University of Leiden. I am grateful to Jonathan Beard for bringing this item to my attention, and to Professor Jacob Smit for his help in translating it.
7. For a very full account of the over-all context, see Noam Chomsky and Edward S. Herman, *The Washington Connection and Third World Fascism* and *After the Cataclysm: Postwar Indochina and the Reconstruction of Imperial Ideology*, vols. 1 and 2 of *The Political Economy of Human Rights* (Boston: South End Press, 1979). For a valuable analysis of the nineteenth-century picture see Ronald T. Takaki, *Iron Cages: Race and Culture in 19th Century America* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1979).

8. For a well-presented account of how giant corporations intervene in the university, see David F. Noble and Nancy E. Pfund, "Business Goes Back to College," *The Nation*, September 20, 1980, pp. 246-52.

CHAPTER ONE: ISLAM AS NEWS

1. See Edward W. Said, *Orientalism*, pp. 49-73.
2. See Norman Daniel, *The Arabs and Medieval Europe* (London: Longmans, Green & Co., 1975); also his earlier and very useful *Islam and the West: The Making of an Image* (Edinburgh: University Press, 1960). There is a first-rate survey of this matter, set in the political context of the 1956 Suez War, by Erskine B. Childers in *The Road to Suez: A Study of Western-Arab Relations* (London: MacGibbon & Kee, 1962), pp. 25-61.
3. I have discussed Naipaul in "Bitter Dispatches From the Third World," *The Nation*, May 3, 1980, pp. 522-25.
4. Maxime Rodinson, *Marxism and The Modern World*, trans. Michael Palis (London: Zed Press, 1979). See also Thomas Hodgkin, "The Revolutionary Tradition in Islam," *Race and Class* 21, no. 3 (Winter 1980): 221-37.
5. There is an elegant account of this theme, done by a contemporary Tunisian intellectual: see Hichem Djait, *L'Europe et l'Islam* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1979). A brilliant psychoanalytic/structuralist reading of one "Islamic" motif in European literature—the seraglio—is to be found in Alain Grosrichard, *Structure du sérail: La Fiction du despotisme asiatique dans l'Occident classique* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1979).
6. See Maxime Rodinson, *La Fascination de l'Islam* (Paris: Maspéro, 1980).
7. Albert Hourani, "Islam and the Philosophers of History," in *Europe and The Middle East* (London: Macmillan & Co., 1980), pp. 19-73.
8. As an instance, see the penetrating study by Syed Hussein Alatas, *The Myth of the Lazy Native: A Study of the Image of the Malays, Filipinos, and Javanese from the 16th to the 20th Century and in the ideology of Colonial Capitalism* (London: Frank Cass & Co., 1977).
9. Not that this has always meant poor writing and scholarship: as an informative general account which answers principally to political exigencies and not mainly to the need for new knowledge about Islam, there is Martin Kramer, *Political Islam* (Washington, D.C.: Sage Publications, 1980). This was written for the Center for Strategic and International Studies, Georgetown University, and therefore belongs to the category of policy, not of "objective," knowledge. Another instance in the January 1980 (vol. 78, no. 453) special issue on "The Middle East, 1980" of *Current History*.

10. *Atlantic Community Quarterly* 17, no. 3 (Fall 1979): 291-305, 377-78.

11. Marshall Hodgson, *The Venture of Islam*, 3 vols. (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1974). See the important review of this by Albert Hourani, *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 37, no. 1 (January 1978): 53-62.

12. One index of this is the report "Middle Eastern and African Studies: Developments and Needs" commissioned by the U.S. Department of Health, Education and Welfare in 1967, written by Professor Morroe Berger of Princeton, also president of the Middle East Studies Association (MESA). In this report Berger asserts that the Middle East "is not a center of great cultural achievement . . . and therefore does not constitute its own reward so far as modern culture is concerned. . . . [It] has been receding in immediate political importance to the U.S." For a discussion of this extraordinary document and the context that produced it, see Said, *Orientalism*, pp. 287-93.

13. Quoted in Michael A. Ledeen and William H. Lewis, "Carter and the Fall of the Shah: The Inside Story," *Washington Quarterly* 3, no. 2 (Spring 1980): 11-12. Ledeen and Lewis are supplemented (and supported to a degree) by William H. Sullivan, "Dateline Iran: The Road Not Taken," *Foreign Policy* 40 (Fall 1980): 175-86; Sullivan was United States ambassador to Iran before and during the revolution. See also the six-part series by Scott Armstrong, "The Fall of the Shah," *Washington Post*, October 25, 26, 27, 28, 29, 30, 1980.

14. Hamid Algar, "The Oppositional Role of the Ulama in Twentieth Century Iran," in Nikki R. Keddie, ed., *Scholars, Saints, and Sufis: Muslim Religious Institutions Since 1500* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London: University of California Press, 1972), pp. 231-55. See also Ervand Abrahamian, "The Crowd in Iranian Politics, 1905-1953," *Past and Present* 41 (December 1968): 184-210; also his "Factionalism in Iran: Political Groups in the 14th Parliament (1944-46)," *Middle Eastern Studies* 14, no. 1 (January 1978): 22-25; also "The Causes of the Constitutional Revolution in Iran," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 10, no. 3 (August 1979): 381-414; and "Structural Causes of the Iranian Revolution," *MERIP Reports* no. 87 (May 1980), pp. 21-26. See also Richard W. Cottam, *Nationalism in Iran* (Pittsburgh, Pa.: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1979).

15. This is especially true of Fred Halliday, *Iran: Dictatorship and Development* (New York: Penguin Books, 1979), which is nevertheless one of the two or three best studies of Iran done since World War II. Maxime Rodinson, in *Marxism and the Muslim World*, has nearly nothing to say about the Muslim religious opposition. Only Algar (note 14 above) seems to have been right on this point—a remarkable achievement.

16. This is the argument put forward in Edward Shils, "The Prospect

for Lebanese Civility," in Leonard Binder, ed., *Politics in Lebanon* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1966), pp. 1-11.

17. Malcolm Kerr, "Political Decision Making in a Confessional Democracy," in Binder, ed., *Politics in Lebanon*, p. 209.

18. See the extraordinarily rich material found in the Moshe Sharett *Personal Diary* (Tel Aviv: Ma'ariv, 1979); Livia Rokach, *Israel's Sacred Terrorism: A Study Based on Moshe Sharett's Personal Diary and Other Documents*, intro. by Noam Chomsky (Belmont, Mass.: Association of Arab-American University Graduates [AAZG], 1980). See also the revelations about the CIA role in Lebanon by former CIA advisor Wilbur Crane Eveland, *Ropes of Sand: America's Failure in the Middle East* (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 1980).

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24. James A. Bill, "Iran and the Crisis of '78," *Foreign Affairs* 57, no. 2 (Winter 1978-79): 341.

25. William O. Beeman, "Devaluing Experts on Iran," *New York Times*, April 11, 1980; James A. Bill, "Iran Experts: Proven Right But Not Consulted," *Christian Science Monitor*, May 6, 1980.

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27. See Said, *Orientalism*, pp. 123-66.

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the colonial world, see *Le Mal de voir: Ethnologie et orientalisme: politique et épistémologie, critique et autocritique*, Cahiers Jussieu no. 2 (Paris: Collections 10/18, 1976). On the way in which "fields" of study coincide with national interests see "Special Supplement: Modern China Studies," *Bulletin of Concerned Asia Scholars* 3, nos. 3-4 (Summer-Fall, 1971): 91-168.

29. See Edmund Ghareeb, ed., *Split Vision: Arab Portrayal in the American Media* (Washington, D.C.: Institute of Middle Eastern and North African Affairs, 1977). For the British counterpart see Sari Nasir, *The Arabs and the English* (London: Longmans, Green & Co., 1979), pp. 140-72.

30. James Peck, "Revolution Versus Modernization and Revisionism: A Two-Front Struggle," in Victor G. Nee and James Peck, eds., *China's Uninterrupted Revolution: From 1840 to the Present* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1975), p. 71. See also Irene L. Gendzier, "Notes Toward a Reading of *The Pasing of Traditional Society*," *Review of Middle East Studies* 3 (London: Ithaca Press, 1978), pp. 32-47.

31. An account of the Pahlavi regime's "modernization" is to be found in Robert Graham, *Iran: The Illusion of Power* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1979). See also Thierry-A. Brun, "The Failures of Western-Style Development Add to the Regime's Problems," and Eric Rouleau, "Oil Riches Underwrite Ominous Militarization in a Repressive Society," in Ali-Reza Nobari, ed., *Iran Erupts* (Stanford, Calif.: Iran-America Documentation Group, 1978). Also Claire Brière and Pierre Blanchet, *Iran: La Révolution au nom de Dieu* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1979); this book has an interview with Michel Foucault appended to it.

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37. Daniel P. Moynihan, "The United States in Opposition," *Commentary*, March 1975, p. 44.

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40. In *Encounter*, 54, no. 5 (May 1980): 20-27.
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48. Robert Darnton, "Writing News and Telling Stories," *Daedalus* 104, no. 2 (Spring 1975): 183, 188, 192.
49. This is convincingly demonstrated by Todd Gitlin, *The Whole World Is Watching: Mass Media in the Making and Unmaking of the New Left* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London: University of California Press, 1980).
50. See in particular Sacvan Bercovitch, "The Rites of Assent: Rhetoric, Ritual, and the Ideology of American Consensus," in Sam Girgus, ed., *Myth, Popular Culture, and the American Ideology* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1980), pp. 3-40.
51. This is well described by Raymond Williams, "Base and Superstructure in Marxist Cultural Theory," *New Left Review* 82 (November-December 1973): 3-16.
52. A series of recent studies dealing with American experiences involving Indians, various foreign groups, and "empty" territory make this point tellingly: see Michael Paul Rogin, *Andrew Jackson and the Subjugation of the American Indian* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1975); Ronald T. Takaki, *Iron Cages: Richard Drinnon, Facing West: The Metaphysics of Indian-Hating and Empire-Building* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1980); Frederick Turner, *Beyond Geography: The Western Spirit Against the Wilderness* (New York: Viking Press, 1980).
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59. As a particularly noteworthy example see the recent work of Mohammed Arkoun: *Contribution à l'étude de l'humanisme arabe au IV^e/X^e siècle: Miskawayh, philosophe et historien* (Paris: J. Vrin, 1970); also *Essais sur la pensée islamique* (Paris: Maisonneuve & Larose, 1973); and "La pensée" and "La vie," in Mohammed Arkoun and Louis Gardet, *L'Islam: Hier. Demain* (Paris: Buchet/Chastel, 1978), pp. 120-247.
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64. W. Montgomery Watt, *What Is Islam?* 2nd ed. (London and New York: Longmans, Green & Co., 1979), pp. 9-21.

65. There is an especially cogent description of this in Albert Hourani, *Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age, 1798-1939* (1962; reprint ed., London and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1970).

66. For a recent, albeit partisan, instance see Adonis (Ali Ahmad Said), *Al-Thabit wal Mutahawwil*, vol. 1, Al-Usul (Beirut: Dar al Awdah, 1974). See also Tayyib Tizini, *Min al-Turath ilal-Thawra: Hawl Nathariya Muqtaraha fi Qadiyyat al-Turath al-'Arabi* (Beirut: Dar Ibn Khaldun, 1978). There is a good account of Tizini's work by Saleh Omar, *Arab Studies Quarterly* 2, no. 3 (Summer 1980): 276-84. For a recent European view of the matter see Jacques Berque, *L'Islam au défi* (Paris: Gallimard, 1980).

67. Hodgson, *Venture of Islam*, 1: 56 ff.

68. Ali Shariati, "Anthropology: The Creation of Man and the Contradiction of God and Iblis, or Spirit and Clay," in *On the Sociology of Islam: Lectures by Ali Shariati*, trans. Hamid Algar (Berkeley, Calif.: Mizan Press, 1979), p. 93.

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70. See Thomas Hodgkin, "The Revolutionary Tradition in Islam," and Adonis, *Al-Thabit wal Mutahawwil*, on the conflict between official cultures and countercultures.

71. Said, *Orientalism*, pp. 41 ff.

72. Until recently the situation was no different in the representation of other "Oriental" groups: see Tom Engelhardt, "Ambush at Kamikaze Pass," *Bulletin of Concerned Asia Scholars* 3, no. 1 (Winter-Spring 1971): 65-84.

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74. According to L. J. Davis, "Consorting with Arabs: The Friends Oil Buys," *Harper's Magazine*, July 1980, p. 40.

CHAPTER TWO: THE IRAN STORY

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2. *Ibid.*, p. 163.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 311.

4. *Ibid.*, pp. 560-61.

5. Kedourie, *Islamic Revolution*.

6. These articles are conveniently found in translation: Rodinson, "Islam Resurgent?" *Gazelle Review* 6, ed. Roger Hardy (London: Ithaca Press, 1979), pp. 1-17.

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8. See Robert Friedman, "The Gallegos Affair," *Media People*, March 1980, pp. 33-34.

9. William A. Dorman and Ehsan Omeed, "Reporting Iran the Shah's Way," *Columbia Journalism Review* 17, no. 5 (January-February 1979): 31.

10. Fazlur Rahman, *Islam* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979), p. 37.

11. Kermit Roosevelt, *Countercoup: The Struggle for the Control of Iran* (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Co., 1979).

12. Hamid Algar, "The Oppositional Role of the 'Ulama in Twentieth-Century Iran," in Keddie, *Scholars, Saints, and Sufis*, pp. 231-55.

13. See Richard Deacon, *The Israeli Secret Service* (New York: Taplinger Publishing Co., 1978), pp. 176-77.

14. For alternative views of Le Monde, see Aimé Guedj and Jacques Girault, *"Le Monde": Humanisme, objectivité et politique* (Paris: Éditions Sociales, 1970), and Philippe Simonnot, *"Le Monde" et le pouvoir* (Paris: Les Presses d'aujourd'hui, 1977).

15. See Clark's proposal for solving the Iran-American crisis: "The Iranian Solution," *The Nation*, June 21, 1980, pp. 737-40.

16. Almost alone, the Middle East Research and Information Project (MERIP) has attempted to do this: see *MERIP Reports*, no. 88 (June 1980), "Iran's Revolution: The First Year," pp. 3-31, or the study of Afghanistan in no. 89 (July-August 1980), pp. 3-26.

CHAPTER THREE: KNOWLEDGE AND POWER

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2. Quoted in Raymond Schwab, *Le Renaissance orientale* (Paris: Payot, 1950), p. 327.
3. Ernest Renan, "Mahomet et les origines de l'islamisme," in *Études d'histoire religieuse* (Paris: Calmann-Lévy, 1880), p. 220.
4. Bernard Lewis, "The State of Middle East Studies," *American Scholar* 48, 3 (Summer 1979), 366-67; emphasis added. It is interesting to compare Lewis's disingenuous assertions with Bryan S. Turner, *Marx and the End of Orientalism* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1978).
5. See, for example, Donald F. Lach and Carol Flammenhaft, eds., *Asia on the Eve of Europe's Expansion* (Englewood Cliffs, N. J.: Prentice-Hall, 1965); Donald F. Lach, *Asia in the Making of Europe*; vol. 1, *The Century of Discovery* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1965), and vol. 2, *A Century of Wonder* (1977); J. H. Parry, *Europe and a Wider World* (London: Hutchinson & Co., 1949), and *The Age of Reconnaissance* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1963). Certainly one should also consult K. M. Panikkar, *Asia and Western Dominance* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1959). For interesting accounts of Asians "discovering" the West in modern times, see Ibrahim Abu-Lughod, *Arab Rediscovery of Europe: A Study in Cultural Encounters* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1963), and Masao Miyoshi, *As We Saw Them: The First Japanese Embassy to the United States (1860)* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London: University of California Press, 1979).
6. There are numerous examples of this, from the career of William Jones, to the Napoleonic expedition to Egypt, to a whole series of nineteenth-century scholar-traveler-agent types: see Said, *Orientalism*, *passim*. See also the revelations about Snouck Hurgronje, note 6, Introduction.
7. See the penetrating review of the work by Bryan S. Turner, *MERICP Reports* no. 68 (June 1978), pp. 20-22. Following Turner's review, in the same issue of *MERICP Reports*, James Paul estimates the cost of the MESA volume at \$85.50 per page.
8. See Said, *Orientalism*, pp. 288-90.
9. Leonard Binder, "Area Studies: A Critical Assessment," in Binder, ed., *Story of the Middle East*, p. 1.
10. *Ibid.*, p. 20.
11. *Ibid.*, p. 21.
12. *Proposal to the Ford Foundation for Two Seminar-Conferences, Program in Near Eastern Studies*, Princeton University (1974-75), pp. 15-16.
13. *Ibid.*, p. 26.
14. L. Carl Brown and Norman Istkovitz, *Psychological Dimensions of Near Eastern Studies* (Princeton, N.J.: Darwin Press, 1977).
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- subject, see the important articles by Benjamin Beit-Hallahmi, "National Character and National Behavior in the Middle East: The Case of the Arab Personality," *International Journal of Group Tensions* 2, no. 3 (1972): 19-28; and Fouad Moghrabi, "The Arab Basic Personality," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 9 (1978): 99-112; also Moghrabi's "A Political Technology of the Soul," *Arab Studies Quarterly* 3, no. 1 (Winter 1981).
16. See "Special Supplement: Modern China Studies," *Bulletin of Concerned Asia Scholars* 3, nos. 3-4 (Summer-Fall 1971).
17. Dwight Macdonald, "Howtoism," in *Against the American Grain* (New York: Vintage Books, 1962), pp. 360-92.
18. Christopher Lasch, *The New Radicalism in America, 1889-1963: The Intellectual as Social Type* (New York: Vintage Books, 1965), p. 316.
19. For an instance of how ethnic origins are cited as "credentials" by a typical Middle East studies expert, see J. C. Hurewitz, "Another View on Iran and the Press," *Columbia Journalism Review* 19, no. 1 (May-June 1980): 19-21. For a response, see Edward W. Said, "Reply," *Columbia Journalism Review* 19 no. 2 (July-August 1980): 68-69.
20. See my comments on recent books by Rodinson and Hourani in *Arab Studies Quarterly* 2, no. 4 (Fall 1980): 386-93.
21. Irène Ferrera-Hochstetter, "Les Études sur le moyen-orient aux États-Unis," *Maghreb-Mashrek* 82 (October-November 1978): 34.
22. Richard H. Nolte, *Middle East Centers at U.S. Universities*, June 1979, p. 2 (courtesy of Mr. Don Snook of Esso Middle East, who very kindly sent me a copy of Nolte's report).
23. *Ibid.*, pp. 40, 46, 20.
24. *Ibid.*, pp. 43, 24.
25. Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, Volume One: An Introduction*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978), p. 34.
26. The phrase is partly Harold Bloom's, although of course he uses it in a very different context and calls it "antithetical criticism": see his book *The Anxiety of Influence: A Theory of Poetry* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973), pp. 93-96.
27. The work of Peter Gran, Judith Tucker, Basem Musallem, Eric Davis, and Stuart Schaar, among others, is representative of this group.
28. See notes 14, 15, and 62, Chapter One.
29. I have discussed the notion of affiliation in "Reflections on Recent American 'Left' Literary Criticism," *Boundary 2* 8, no. 1 (Fall 1979): 26-29.
30. Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (New York: Seabury Press, 1975), p. 238.
31. See Ali Jandaghi's comments on Marvin Zonis's study of the Iranian elite, in "The Present Situation in Iran," *Monthly Review*, November 1973, pp. 34-47.
32. As instances, there is J. B. Kelly, *Arabia, the Gulf and the West*,

who bewails the departure of the British east of Suez; there is Élie Kedourie, who attacks de Gaulle for having "given up" Algeria—see his review of Alistair Horne, *A Savage War of Peace: Algeria, 1954–1962* in the *Times Literary Supplement*, April 21, 1978, pp. 447–50; and there is Robert W. Tucker and a whole string of followers who have been advocating an American invasion of the Gulf for at least five years (see notes 34 and 38, Chapter One). Behind much of this is the work of Edward N. Luttwak: see the model presented in his book *The Grand Strategy of the Roman Empire: From the First Century A.D. to the Third* (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976).

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The Iranian revolution, the hostage crisis, and the energy shortage are instances of how dramatically "Islam" has become news. In the West, academic experts, corporate and governmental policymakers, and the media see "Islam" as representing everything from anti-Americanism to good business to an inferior culture, a dangerously enthusiastic religion, and bad values. In response to this, Islamic countries use "Islam" to strengthen state structures or to rally masses, thereby papering over the diversity beneath the Islamic cover.

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"*Covering Islam* should be read by every foreign correspondent and every editor of foreign news.... Edward Said shows that the American press has invented a fiction for itself called 'Islam,' something like the American picture of 'Communism' in the 1950s.... Said's analysis is cool and persuasive. He is no apologist for anyone. This is an important book."

Frances Fitzgerald,
author of *Fire in the Lake* and *America Revised*